



If jhana is total absorption without physical sensation, why is pain only abandoned in the fourth jhana?

[DeadBuddha](#) 1 June 12, 2023, 10:04am

Hi,

[SN 16.9](#) says that pain is abandoned in the fourth jhāna. This suggests that there may still be pain in the preceding jhāna. However, if jhāna is total absorption without physical sensation, it should not be possible to feel pain in the preceding jhānas. How can this be explained?

Whenever I want, with the giving up of pleasure and pain, and the ending of former happiness and sadness, I enter and remain in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness.

Thanks in advance

1 Like

[kumara](#) 2 June 13, 2023, 7:59am

I don't want to answer your question here, but I'm sure you'll find the answer in this book: [What You Might Not Know about Jhāna & Samādhi](#)

5 Likes

[sabbamitta](#) 3 June 13, 2023, 8:32am

DeadBuddha:

[SN 16.9](#) says that pain is abandoned in the fourth jhāna

I think the pain that is given up in the fourth Jhana is not physical pain. Physical sensations have long been given up at that moment. I think the phrase “giving up pleasure and pain, and ending former happiness and sadness” refers to something mental, not physical. Perhaps what it speaks of is the very concept of this distinction between pleasure and pain.

I find the description in DN 9 particularly clear in this respect because this focuses on the perceptions in each of these stages. And it makes it very clear that with the first Jhana, physical sensations are abandoned:

DN9:10.1-3: Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, they enter and remain in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected.

The sensual perception that they had previously ceases.

At that time they have a subtle and true perception of the rapture and bliss born of seclusion.

And for the fourth Jhana:

DN9:13.1-3: “Furthermore, giving up pleasure and pain, and ending former happiness and sadness, a mendicant enters and remains in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness.

The subtle and true perception of bliss with equanimity that they had previously ceases.

At that time they have a subtle and true perception of neutral feeling.

What is left here is a neutral feeling, so I think what is given up at this stage is the distinction between pleasant and unpleasant feeling.

9 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 4 June 13, 2023, 6:09pm

Thank you for your message Venerable.

I have already read your book, it is really excellent and very interesting. Thank you very much for the work you have done for the good of beings.

Basically, I’m more on the side of the visuddhimagga jhana designed by the Pa-Auk system. However, as I read the suttas and your book, I’m getting more and more the impression that the

jhânas may have been very different from what the Pa-Auk system says.

But for the moment, my way of thinking is that, for safety's sake, it's better to practice the visuddhimagga jhânas, because at least we can be sure that the concentration permitted by these jhâna is sufficient to internalize the insight of vipassana, whereas with non-visuddhimagga jhânas there's always a risk that concentration won't be sufficient for vipassana (and because of all this debate, I don't know which jhânas were taught by the Buddha).

But that doesn't change the fact that your book is a blessing, thank you again.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 5 June 13, 2023, 6:48pm

Thank you very much for your message Bhante.

However, personally, I find that your sutta on the first jhana speaks rather of the one who has entered the first jhâna ceasing to be in a state of mind of attachment to the senses, and not of no longer having physical sensations.

That is, the elimination of sensuality does not mean that there is no longer any physical sensation, but it does mean that there is no longer any passion for physical sensations.

2 Likes

[sabbamitta](#) 6 June 13, 2023, 7:14pm

DeadBuddha:

That is, the elimination of sensuality does not mean that there is no longer any physical sensation, but it does mean that there is no longer any passion for physical sensations.

Well it doesn't say "the sensual *attachment* that they had previously ceases", but "the sensual *perception* that they had previously ceases". "Perception" is *sañña*.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 7 June 14, 2023, 12:27am

DeadBuddha:

But for the moment, my way of thinking is that, for safety's sake, it's better to practice the visuddhimagga jhânas, because at least we can be sure that the concentration permitted by these jhâna is sufficient to internalize the insight of vipassana, whereas with non-visuddhimagga jhânas there's always a risk that concentration won't be sufficient for vipassana

How do you understand "vipassana" as you wrote above?

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 8 June 14, 2023, 6:24am

Hiya,

This is not just SN16.9; it is the standard way the fourth jhanas are phrased.

I for one am of the opinion that the "deeper" jhanas where there are no experiences of the body, are what the Buddha practiced. In my understanding, in jhanas 1, 2 and 3 there is no pain, either physical or mental, there is only piti and/or sukha. And indeed the first three jhanas of course don't mention the presence of pain.

Also:

At a time when a noble disciple enters and dwells in the rapture of seclusion, five things aren't present in him. The pain and sadness connected with sensual pleasures. The pleasure and happiness connected with sensual pleasures. (AN5.176)

That is to say, physical (or "sensual") pleasure and pain were already abandoned in the first jhana, which is the rapture (pīti) of seclusion—meaning seclusion from the five senses.

So what's happening with the fourth jhana formula "with the giving up of pleasure and pain"? It's a good question.

It helps if you look at this phrase a bit less technically, not as two different factors that are abandoned, but more as a description of what the fourth jhana is like. It refers to the whole gamut of both pleasure (sukha) and displeasure (dukkha), which *together* are abandoned. When sukha of the third jhana fades away, the whole pain-pleasure "faculty", in a sense, is left behind. This idea is repeated in various ways, first by saying "pleasure and displeasure are abandoned", then by saying

“happiness and sadness are ended”, and once more by saying that the fourth jhana is adukkha-asukkha, “without pleasure or pain”. All these are different ways to emphasize that the fourth jhana is a neutral experience, as Ven. Sabbamitta also said.

In short, because sukha is abandoned by going into the fourth jhana, and dukkha isn't there either, you go beyond all pleasure *and* pain.

It's like a coin with two sides; in the first three jhanas you only look at one side (the sukha), having turned away the dukkha side. In the fourth jhana you throw the whole coin away, so you discard both sukha and dukkha.

Does that make sense? At least intellectually?

If not, Ajahn Brahmali explained it in a workshop we gave last year, but I can't remember exactly which session it was, so you'll have to search around bit. 🙄

<https://bswa.org/teaching/sammasamadhi-right-stillness-workshops-2022/>. Probably session 5 or 6 if I recall.

I recently gave a talk where I very briefly addressed this as well, somewhere near the end:

Hope that helps.

9 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 9 June 14, 2023, 8:42am

I understand vipassana as the insightful knowledge of phenomena as suffering, unstable, non-self. But I also think we can include dependent origination.

In fact, when I read the suttas, I don't really get the impression that the Buddha is asking us to practice samatha and vipassana completely separately. I get the impression that you're supposed to do both at the same time.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 10 June 14, 2023, 8:49am

DeadBuddha:

In fact, when I read the suttas, I don't really get the impression that the Buddha is asking us to practice samatha and vipassana completely separately. I get the impression that you're supposed to do both at the same time.

Right. And is that in line with what you've learnt from the Pa Auk tradition?

1 Like

[sabbamitta](#) 11 June 14, 2023, 8:52am

DeadBuddha:

In fact, when I read the suttas, I don't really get the impression that the Buddha is asking us to practice samatha and vipassana completely separately

Very right! The Buddha never makes this distinction. In fact, he doesn't even speak of samatha meditation or vipassanā meditation at all. See also Ajahn Brahmali's [very nice essay on the topic](#) (PDF for download).

6 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 12 June 14, 2023, 9:20am

No... They make a clear distinction in practice. First, you're supposed to practice samatha (ideally, you're supposed to reach all 8 jhānas; otherwise, you'll need access concentration), then you're supposed to use this extreme concentration to fully practice vipassana.

From what I've just said, you might think that the best thing to do is not to follow the Pa-Auk system.

But all things considered, I'm not at all sure that my intuitive understanding of the suttas is correct, and besides, even if the Pa-Auk system were slightly different from the Buddha's methods, I don't really see why it wouldn't lead to Nibanna.

From what I understand, in this system, the practical separation between samatha and vipassana is due to the fact that it's difficult to build up good concentration while practising vipassana (because the real objects are too unstable). It is therefore necessary to practice samatha separately, based on unreal concepts (such as patibagha nimitta). It doesn't seem aberrant at all.

And again, I find that practicing this system is safer, because the concentration offered is really excellent, so I'm not afraid that it's insufficient to internalize wisdom through vipassana.

[DeadBuddha](#) 13 June 14, 2023, 9:25am

Thank you very much for this information Bhante.

However, in [this](#) sutta, I have the impression that the Buddha is talking about samatha and vipassana (but I don't read Pali at all) :

And what are the things that should be developed by direct knowledge?

Katame ca, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā bhāvetabbā?

Serenity and discernment.

Samatho ca vipassanā ca—

These are called the things that should be developed by direct knowledge.

ime vuccanti, bhikkhave, dhammā abhiññā bhāvetabbā.

Am I wrong?

Thank you in advance

2 Likes

[sabbamitta](#) 14 June 14, 2023, 9:27am

Yes, the Buddha mentions the two together, but not as a *meditation method*. It's rather the *result* of the practice.

5 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 15 June 14, 2023, 9:37am

Thank you so much for your answers Venerable, I value them very highly to move forward on the path!!!

3 Likes

[kumara](#) 16 June 14, 2023, 9:38am

DeadBuddha:

even if the Pa-Auk system were slightly different from the Buddha's methods, I don't really see why it wouldn't lead to Nibanna

Are they slightly different, or mutually contradicting?

1 Like

[kumara](#) 17 June 14, 2023, 9:42am

sabbamitta:

Yes, the Buddha mentions the two together, but not as a *meditation method*. It's rather the *result* of the practice.

As I read the text, it actually says "bhāvetabbā" (should be developed) though.

1 Like

[sabbamitta](#) 18 June 14, 2023, 10:01am

DeadBuddha:

From what I've just said, you might think that the best thing to do is not to follow the Pa-Auk system.

If practicing according to the Pa-Auk system is helpful for you, then there is no reason not to do it.

To paraphrase Ajahn Brahmali from the text linked above: Although the Buddha never speaks of "samatha meditation" or "vipassana meditation", if your meditation—no matter how it's called—leads to more *samatha* and more *vipassanā* (the two will always grow together), then it's a good method for you.

kumara:

As I read the text, it actually says “bhāvetabbā” (should be developed) though.

This Sutta follows the pattern of the four noble truths as explained in the Buddha’s first discourse, SN 56.11. There he connects a certain activity with each of the truths, something that needs to be done with respect to this particular truth.

Here, the fourth noble truth, which is the noble eightfold path, has to be developed, *bhāvetabba*. If in the context of AN 4.254 the Buddha says that *samatha* and *vipassanā* need to be developed (by direct insight), so he basically equates them with the noble eightfold path. *Samatha* and *vipassanā* in this Sutta are in fact used as a synonym for “the noble eightfold path”. So they are not a meditation method, but they are what comes out when you develop the noble eightfold path.

That’s how I understand it.

5 Likes

[kumara](#) 19 June 14, 2023, 10:25am

I fully agree with you here. I’ve read that sutta too.

I was referring to the part “It’s rather the *result* of the practice.”

1 Like

[sabbamitta](#) 20 June 14, 2023, 11:25am

kumara:

I was referring to the part “It’s rather the *result* of the practice.”

Hmm ... I am not sure where exactly you see the contradiction here. I didn’t actually understand why you used the word “though” here:

kumara:

As I read the text, it actually says “bhāvetabbā” (should be developed) though.

Can you explain please?

As I understand it, there is not a method or technique called “samatha meditation” or “vipassanā meditation”, but if you practice meditation well—and the entire noble eightfold path, which culminates in *sammā samādhi*—both *samatha* and *vipassanā* are developed.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 21 June 14, 2023, 11:55am

I don't know if the Buddha's jhānas are non-visudhimaggian, but if they were, then there would be a contradiction with the Pa-Auk teaching, because the Pa-Auk system says that it's not the non-visudhimaggian jhanas that should be practiced.

Although in my mind the word “contradiction” has a very pejorative connotation in this sense, I'm not sure that this contradiction would imply that the Pa-Auk teaching doesn't lead to Nibanna, unless the Buddha had somehow said that Pa-Auk-type jhānas shouldn't be practised.

However, Venerable, I find your remarks very interesting and forceful, thank you!

[DeadBuddha](#) 22 June 14, 2023, 2:09pm

Let me come back to this post, Bhante.

Perhaps the change in perception is something else? It seems that perception is a mental process of labels, categories and images. So the end of a specific perception would not mean the end of contact, feelings or physical perceptions .

Please, what do you think?

1 Like

[sabbamitta](#) 23 June 14, 2023, 3:11pm

DeadBuddha:

Please, what do you think?

I think that when you are in first jhana and your telephone rings, you won't hear it.

Of course the sound touches the ear and so on, so physically there is a contact, but there is no ear consciousness arising, so you don't perceive the sound. I think this is because the mind is fully absorbed in this rapture and bliss.

Once the person does hear the sound of the telephone, they have lost this absorption and emerged from this state.

I have heard Ajahn Brahm and many others explain it in such a way.

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 24 June 14, 2023, 4:30pm

Thank you again for your help, Venerable.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 25 June 15, 2023, 12:12am

Like I said

kumara:

I was referring to the part "It's rather the *result* of the practice."

If you say samatha and vipassana is *result* of the practice, you would also have to say the same about N8P, going by what you rightly said earlier.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 26 June 15, 2023, 12:16am

In the Suttas, there's such thing as wrong samadhi, leading to wrong knowing and wrong liberation. I believe the Buddha was referring to the absorption practices.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 27 June 15, 2023, 12:31am

DeadBuddha:

Perhaps the change in perception is something else? It seems that perception is a mental process of labels, categories and images. So the end of a specific perception would not mean the end of contact, feelings or physical perceptions .

Ven [sabbamitta](#)'s idea of perception clearly contradicts yours (and that's not pejorative).

The Suttas do not support the use of the word "saññā" as sense perception. If it does, terms such as "anattasaññā" would be meaningless.

1 Like

[josephzizys](#) 28 June 15, 2023, 12:55am

sabbamitta:

Physical sensatiions have long been given up at that moment.

I think this is false and in fact incoherent.

There are no non-physical sensations.

In fact i think the bulk of EBT's manifestly reject the idea that there can be coherent talk of mental states without recourse to contact, i.e embodied sensation and perception of some kind.

Even the mind made body (something alledged to be created by masters of the 4th jhana in the EBT) must in some sense be dependent on the physical body, otherwise it would be immortal/independent.

2 Likes

[Preston](#) 29 June 15, 2023, 3:01am

josephzizys:

In fact i think the bulk of EBT's manifestly reject the idea that there can be coherent talk of mental states without recourse to contact, i.e embodied sensation and perception of some kind.

Could you provide a sutta or two supporting this? In particular suttas which reject the idea of mental states without embodiment?

I'm not sure how to square what you've written with the formless states where the five sense bases are explicitly said to cease leaving only the mind sense base left. For example MN 43 (likely a late sutta) and AN 9.37. Of course, there's also the formula for the formless bases as well which strongly suggest the senses ceasing except for the mind sense base during the formless attainments.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 30 June 15, 2023, 3:42am

DeadBuddha:

when I read the suttas, I don't really get the impression that the Buddha is asking us to practice samatha and vipassana completely separately.

sabbamitta:

The Buddha never makes this distinction.

While I don't disagree, in a sense this vipassana/samatha debate is just a matter of definition, though. 😊 There are practices in the suttas which are aimed towards abandoning the hindrances (the "calming" practices) and there are practices that are primarily aimed towards generating insight. It's clear that you don't have to do these things at the same time. For deep insight you surely don't, that's why samadhi is said to *lead to* seeing things as they are. The two are not the same thing; otherwise everybody who attained jhanas would be stream winners, and that's not the case. You can attain the jhanas and get no real insight at all.

And while satipatthana is mainly meant to abandon the hindrances, there's also such a thing as satipatthanabhavana in the suttas, which is said to be done after the mind is unified, it's aimed at penetrating the dhamma deeply, to generate insight.

Now some people call the calming practices 'samatha' and the insight-focused practices 'vipassana'. That *terminology* is not completely in line with the suttas, but that doesn't disprove the general idea of these practices. It just shows they use terms differently.

(And what *some* people call ‘vipassana’, like scanning the body, is not really an insight practice at all, in my opinion. But once you realize that, then the actual method is not wrong per se. Just a different word is used.)

Sometimes people jump on inconsistent terminology (I’m not saying you are, but this is a general thing) thinking they thereby disprove the entire idea. It’s the same with some terms like “neighborhood (or access) samadhi” or what have you. Sure, the Buddha never used those words, but it’s the commentaries’ job to comment on things, and you can only do that usefully if you talk about things in a different way, using different terms. So if somebody uses “neighborhood samadhi” that doesn’t automatically mean their teachings aren’t in line with the Buddha’s. They just use different terminology.

And to be honest, I don’t know any teacher who is completely in line with the suttas with their use of terminology.

In short, it’s just too easy to say “oh this term is different from how the Buddha used it” and then conclude the whole system is wrong. (Again, I’m not saying anybody here is. I’m talking in general. You probably read some of these kinds of arguments in books.)

Just thought I’d say that. 🙄 It may avoid some unnecessary arguments one day, or at least I can hope. 😊

7 Likes

[Dan](#) 31 June 15, 2023, 4:30am

Bhante, thank you for your offerings of dhamma I love the similes hehe. The faculty of recognition of pleasure or pain makes a lot of sense intellectually... I can imagine it two ways. First way, it seems if it is possible to recognize something as sukha, then it is possible to delight in sukha, being possible to delight... that can be a sort of disturbance? There’s a risk of like “wow” and exiting? I don’t know but I guess it is that way as this may be the how and why of how the 4th jhana can touch on the higher fetters such as restlessness and conceit ... which seem to have some delight as origins... in restlessness some delight is given to attention, in conceit some delight is being.

The other idea is it is the mind develops to such a point it recognizes neutrality as superior. Maybe this is the same thing... it sees delight as dangerous? However it seems this involves vedana and I imagine the freedom of jhana to be kinda free of vedana, tanha, contact etc and temporarily “sankhara” (until it comes back)

(And what some people call ‘vipassana’, like scanning the body, is not really an insight practice at all, in my opinion. But once you realize that, then the actual method is not wrong per se. Just a different word is used.)

Bhante maybe this is unfair for us putthajanas who need putthajana insight before we can get going into the sammāsamadhi part of the path hehe. One aspect of this technique I think is commonly misunderstood is you are moving your attention - because that is abandoning. If attention gets “sticky” on one part of the body it’s a sign the mind hasn’t learned patinissagha or some sort of abandoning with regards to it (so then are encouraged to develop anicca sanna there). Also examining the whole field of vedana as anicca and dukkha and really help the mind see the dangers there and learn to recline (minds want peace and to avoid suffering naturally). Additionally doing it with the full variety of experience, there’s no ignoring a part of experience which can be subtle hinderance. I have heard some very educated people say this technique “it’s not a stable enough object to develop jhana” but the mental object of the body (“mind made body”, perhaps?) goes from complexity to simplicity over time, and sometimes disappears (it seems intellectually conceivable if ones experience is “one pointed” to me). which is when a lot of people in that system get kind of excited and strong cravings for the disappearance lol hehe (it’s commonly called “bhanga”) I don’t think that is jhana but seeing positive effects from the mind releasing *parts* of experience it was previously attached to *upadana* through seeing anicca and dukkha seems like an important preparatory skill (7th part of the path)

I imagine “real insight” is like in the suttas, seeing the ways this whole body and mind came to be and deep insight into dependent origination etc, is that the ball park?

With metta

EDIT: On reflecting, I think I may be asking too much here, the antidote to doubt is investigation, please forgive my digging too hard to have it all “intellectually” ironed out. On reflecting I think this kind of investigation may not be the helpful kind, this kind of “knowledge” is one of the causes of doubt - having to have it all mapped out etc (as opposed to experience, investigation and understanding) with metta.

5 Likes

[sabbamitta](#) 32 June 15, 2023, 6:26am

Thank you for your nuanced perspective, Bhante. This is very helpful. ❤️

3 Likes

[kumara](#) 33 June 15, 2023, 7:04am

kumara:

The Suttas do support the use of the word “saññā” as sense perception. If it does, terms such as “anattasaññā” would be meaningless.

Oops. I meant to say "The Suttas do **not** support the use of the word “saññā” as sense perception.

[faujidoc1](#) 34 June 15, 2023, 8:21am

This question is answered somewhat in AN9.41

To quickly summarize, it is the perceptions which accompany the previous (lower) absorption which are considered stressful / afflictive (and hence psychologically painful) by one in a higher absorption.

I entered and remained in the second absorption. While I was in that meditation, perceptions accompanied by placing the mind beset me due to loss of focus, and that was an affliction for me. Suppose a happy person were to experience pain; that would be an affliction for them. In the same way, when perceptions accompanied by placing the mind and keeping it connected beset me due to loss of focus, that was an affliction for me.

This sutta seems to suggest that what is given up in the fourth absorption is physical pleasure/ pain (ie that which is derived from the nociceptors of the body). Psychological pain still occurs if the person teeters on the brink of losing the fourth jhana and shifting to a lower one.

Also, for one in the fifth absorption, the fourth absorption is seen as painful. Clearly, the pain being referred to in this context is psychological. Hence the pain which has been lost in the fourth absorption must be physical. And there would be no need to specifically mention the loss of that kind of pain as belonging to the fourth absorption, if it had already been lost in the first absorption.

So, it's highly likely that what is being described is a gradient where as the mind goes from 1st to 3rd absorption, there is a higher and higher loss of ability of the Mind to pay attention to sense inputs (and hence to perceive them), till in the 4th absorption it is completely cut off from the sensory system. This would fit in well with the stock description of the first four absorptions as 'Form' jhanas while the fifth onwards become 'formless'.



2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 35 June 15, 2023, 8:59am

Very interesting, thank you Venerable !

[DeadBuddha](#) 36 June 15, 2023, 9:01am

Thank you for your message.

Personally, I feel that jhânas are already a practice of insight.

But I don't think this implies that a practitioner of the jhânas is necessarily automatically a sotapanna, because the awakening required for sotapanna may require, depending on the individual, a greater or lesser amount of practice, so that having attained the 4 jhânas is not necessarily enough: to be a sotapanna, we may need to increase our knowledge by repeatedly practising the jhânas, but we also need to practise sila better, and so on. Little by little, with practice, gross and subtle illusions are eliminated.

I put a lot of "maybe" because I have no idea whether these ideas are true. It may be totally false.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 37 June 15, 2023, 9:17am

Interesting, thank you !

[Sunyo](#) 38 June 15, 2023, 9:40am

kumara:

Oops. I meant to say "The Suttas do **not** support the use of the word "saññā" as sense perception.



I disagree, bhante. There is for example in DN1 talk about eternalism, being "percipient (*saññā*) after death".

There are some ascetics and brahmins who say there is life after death, and assert that the self lives on after death in a percipient form on sixteen grounds.

This means just being aware after death, having any type of consciousness. It doesn't mean perception in the sense of "a mental process of labels, categories and images", as DeadBuddha called it. It means you're just aware after death.

Likewise, *kāmasaññā*, in the passage referred to by Ven. Sabbamitta at least, means being **aware** of the sense objects, not sense desire or something.

There are more passages which indicate this. The PED dictionary therefore gives different applications of the word *saññā*, and one application is glossed as consciousness / awareness. I believe this applies to *kāmasaññā* in said passage.

Preston:

I'm not sure how to square what you've written with the formless states where the five sense bases are explicitly said to cease leaving only the mind sense base left.

This is not really true. It says nothing about the five senses. It says *rūpa-saññā* and *patigha-saññā* have ceased. People *interpret* this as the five senses, but that is not what it says. I don't think it refers to the five senses but to mental perceptions. It's an odd phrase, admittedly, and rather rare as well, but it doesn't mention the five senses.

4 Likes

[kumara](#) 39 June 15, 2023, 9:47am

So, does your example support Ven. Sabbamitta's example of *saññā* as hearing sound?

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 40 June 15, 2023, 9:54am

Yes. Because it shows that perception is not just ideas or mental process of labels or suchlike more “cognitive things”. It can also just mean being aware of things, being conscious of things. It’s also said that consciousness, perception, and feeling are indistinguishable and inseparable.

Then there’s six type of perception, one for each of the 6 senses. So what does *kāmasañña* refer to? Five of these types of perception, those of the five senses.

This is also why *kāma* is in the plural in *vivicceva kāmehi* (secluded from the sense objects). It refers to the five objects. If it referred to sense desire, it would have been in the singular.

As the *Critical Pali Dictionary* says:

kāma: [...] (mostly in sg.) wish, desire, [...] (in pl.) the objects of sensual pleasure viz. *rūpa*, *sadda*, *gandha*, *rasa*, *phoṭṭhabba* [sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles].

If “perception of the sense objects” (*kāmasañña*) has ceased, it means you’re not aware of the five sense objects anymore. And therefore you can’t hear sounds. That’s how I interpret it.

5 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 41 June 15, 2023, 10:05am

Dan:

On reflecting, I think I may be asking too much here

To be honest, Dan, I think you’re right, hahaha. I’m not even sure what you’re asking. Thanks for sharing your thoughts anyway. 😊

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 42 June 15, 2023, 10:32am

Thank you very much Venerable [@Sunyo](#) , you have an interesting interpretation!

[Preston](#) 43 June 15, 2023, 2:16pm

Sunyo:

This is not really true. It says nothing about the five senses.

Hi Bhante in my post I quoted two suttas which are explicit about the 5 senses ceasing in the formless. I think you missed them, or are just commenting on what I said about the formula itself. Anyways, here you go from MN 43:

“What can be known by purified mind consciousness released from the five senses?”
“Aware that ‘space is infinite’ it can know the dimension of infinite space. Aware that ‘consciousness is infinite’ it can know the dimension of infinite consciousness. Aware that ‘there is nothing at all’ it can know the dimension of nothingness.

AN 9.37 words things a bit more oddly, but IMO the meaning is clear.

Also for the points about the formula itself I remember surveying those expressions previously and finding that one of them is associated with the five sense bases. I didn’t take notes though, and the above two passages are clear enough IMO anyways. I don’t want to spend the time right now to redo that analysis. Maybe some other time, and I’ll PM you what I find if you’re interested.

2 Likes

[sikkhadhamma](#) 44 June 15, 2023, 3:24pm

sabbamitta:

so physically there is a contact, but there is no ear consciousness arising

Hi, Bhante. I was wondering, are you referring to ear-contact and ear-consciousness as found in SN12.2?

1 Like

[sabbamitta](#) 45 June 15, 2023, 3:35pm

sikkhadhamma:

are you referring to ear-contact and ear-consciousness as found in [SN12.2](#)?

Well, I think I rather meant this process as described for example in SN 35.61:

Ear consciousness arises dependent on the ear and sounds. The meeting of the three is contact.

I should perhaps have phrased my sentence a little differently.

The sound is there, but the ear is not receptive, so no ear consciousness arises.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 46 June 16, 2023, 12:44am

Sunyo:

This is also why kāma is in the plural in vivicceva kāmehi (secluded from the sense objects). It refers to the five objects. If it referred to sense desire, it would have been in the singular.

It's hard to understand how the meaning of a word should be different because of the number.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 47 June 16, 2023, 12:48am

Does that sutta say anything about saññā?

1 Like

[sikkhadhamma](#) 48 June 16, 2023, 10:02am

Sunyo:

the “deeper” jhanas where there are no experiences of the body, are what the Buddha practiced. In my understanding, in jhanas 1, 2 and 3 there is no pain, either physical or mental, there is only piti and/or sukha.

Hi, Bhante. I was wondering, how does the meditator -without experiences of the body during those three jhanas- know that:

1. their body gets drenched, steeped, filled, and spread with piti and/or sukha? and
2. there's no part of their body that's not spread with piti and/or sukha?

2 Likes

[Erik ODonnell](#) 49 June 16, 2023, 10:45am

kumara:

It's hard to understand how the meaning of a word should be different because of the number.

Here are some examples in English I found on Google 😊

- Manner vs. manners
- Wood vs. woods
- Force vs. forces

‘Look at the wood’ vs. ‘look at the woods’ is probably the most straightforward one. In singular it means a piece of wood, in plural it means a forest.

I struggle to think of examples in my native Norwegian though; it probably varies from language to language how common this is. English is kind of a hot mess let's be honest 😊

Edit: Actually, in Norwegian the singular force means ‘cancer’ (the disease), while the plural means forces (as in ‘the forces of nature’ but not including armed forces). There's no logic to this, you just have to know it.

3 Likes

[Pondera](#) 50 June 16, 2023, 12:06pm

sikkhadhamma:

Hi, Bhante. I was wondering, how does the meditator -without experiences of the body during those three jhanas- know that:

1. their body gets drenched, steeped, filled, and spread with piti and/or sukha? and
2. there's no part of their body that's not spread with piti and/or sukha?

That's a good point.

The other consideration here is that Nirodha Samapatti is "the cessation of perception and feeling" - no sounds, smells, tastes, sights - and no feeling of the body.

Or, in Nirodha Samapatti, the skandhas cease ... meaning that, because sense consciousness has been abandoned, there is no way to hold on to the *binding* between form, feeling, impulse, and perception.

We also have "neither perception nor non-perception" as the precursor to Nirodha Samapatti ... in other words, a transitional state where consciousness (sense consciousness) is in the *process* of being abandoned ... for example, one *knows* that they are in the presence of sense media, but cannot *decipher* that media into anything "meaningful".

Because they do not decipher the media it cannot be called perception, but because they also recognize the media *as* media it is cannot be called "non-perception".

I believe the highest attainment taught by the Buddha was a supermundane state where all sense perception has been abandoned. I do not think the ultimate goal of abandonment of skhandas and absolutely no perception of the body occurs in the lower jhanas. And I strongly believe that no perception of the body, "Unbinding", and being *conscious* (ie. "aware") of that state should be differentiated from the "unconscious jhana" that is sometimes "espoused".

I see the lower jhanas as stepping stones towards *that* goal; wherein the senses are deliberately detached from - in this case we have five senses, but because the tongue and the body are both tactile sense organs (if you think about it), there are four stages of deliberate detachment from the senses. The bliss and rapture of the jhanas are just the body in a state of detachment from the senses.

The bliss and jhana are what we *would* feel all of the time if we were *withdrawn* from the senses and not "slaves" to them.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 51 June 16, 2023, 1:51pm

Preston:

Hi Bhante in my post I quoted two suttas which are explicit about the 5 senses ceasing in the formless

Thanks for the clarification, Preston. 😊 I did indeed overlook the quotes, reading too quickly. But these texts also don't say that the 5 senses cease only in the formless attainments.

They just say the formless attainments "can be known with purified (*parisuddhena*) mind consciousness released from the five senses". Where does it say "explicitly" that in the jhanas there are still the five senses, and that they cease only in the formless attainments? To me, that is what you add to it.

I believe the key aspect in this statement is *parisuddhena*, not the five senses. It's only in the fourth jhana that the mind becomes *purified*, namely in equanimity and mindfulness, (*upekkha-sati-parisuddhim*). Then this purity continues in the formless states. But the five senses already ceased in the first jhana (or even before that generally).

It's a bit like I would say to my (hypothetical) child: When you get your driver's license, then with our car you can go into town. This doesn't mean the car appears at the moment he gets his driver's license. We had that car already. Likewise, in the jhanas the 5 senses were already abandoned, but only at the fourth does it become purified in equanimity—with which the 4 formless attainments "can be known".

Not the greatest analogy, but I think you get my argument.

But that discussion aside, this passage clearly speaks favorably of abandoning the five senses. So that kind of "absorption" (I prefer 'unification') away from the five senses was something encouraged by the Buddha, at whatever level we think it is achieved (at the first jhana or the formless states). Therefore, as DeadBuddha pointed out before, if people try to aim for these mind-only states, they are safe either way.

Let's say (just hypothetically) that I and others with similar ideas are wrong about the jhanas and there was still physical sense perception there. In that case, if people practice to go into the mind-only realm, they'll at worst overshoot the mark, and end up in the formless states. That's way less problematic than if I were *right*, and they were satisfied with something lower than the jhanas.

However, I know this may sound arrogant, but I'm sure I'm not wrong.

6 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 52 June 16, 2023, 1:51pm

kumara:

It's hard to understand how the meaning of a word should be different because of the number.

Hi bhante, 🙏

Every Pali dictionaries I have list the two meanings of *kāma* of 'desire' and 'object'. I just quoted the Critical Pali Dictionary because it indicates this use of the singular and plural, but it's in all of them.

But it is not "because of" the number that the meaning changes. It is because of the *context*. The number is just an extra indication we can use in this particular case of *kāma*.

Words can have multiple meanings, as everybody knows. If I say 'match', some people will think of a sports game, others of a small stick to light a candle. The two meanings of *kāma* are not as far apart as the two meanings of 'match', but they are still distinctly separate.

Now, it just happens to be the case that one of the two meanings of *kāma* is *used* solely (or almost solely) in the plural, and the other in the singular. But it is not the number that makes for the different meaning by itself. The number is a consequence of how the word is used. And we can use that to know which meaning applies.

Let's imagine that 'matches' (plural) would always be used in the sense of a 'fire lighting sticks' and 'match' (singular) always in the sense of a game. Of course that's not true in English, so it's not a great example, but that's how it basically works with *kāma*. We can tell by it's number what it means.

And in case of the jhanas the context also indicates this. Sense *desire* is already included in the "unwholesome qualities", the five hindrances, which are abandoned when one enters the first jhana. The other thing that is abandoned, the *kāmehi*, refers to the sense objects.

There is no good reason why the Buddha would isolate one of the five hindrances and mention it twice; also there are many text that indicate that *kāmehi* refers to the objects.

Or how do you understand this formula?

3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 53 June 16, 2023, 1:52pm

sikkhadhamma:

Hi, Bhante. I was wondering, how does the meditator -without experiences of the body during those three jhanas- know that:

It's a very unfortunate over-literal translation of the word *kāya*, which indeed sometimes means 'body' but also can mean 'person', just like 'somebody' means a person and not a body. When Bhikkhu Bodhi for example translates "he realizes the supreme truth *with the body* (*kāya*)" (AN4.113), this is obviously way too literal. You don't experience the truth with the body; it means you experience the truth personally, or "with your own experience".

With respect to the passage you mentioned, the PTS dictionary says:

Best to be grouped here is an application of *kāya* in the sense of the self as experiencing a great joy; the whole being, the "inner sense," or heart.

This "inner sense" is the mind, which experiences the joy and bliss.

The *pīti* (joy/rapture/delight) of the jhanas is called *pītimano*, delight of the mind. Hence the suttas say: "When the mind is full of rapture, the body becomes tranquil." This means you focus so much on the mental rapture, the body becomes so tranquil that you can't feel it anymore. Then also *sukha* arises because of that, which is also a mental feeling.

"When the *mind* is full of rapture" doesn't rhyme with "their *body* gets drenched, steeped, filled, and spread with *pīti*". But the word 'body' is incorrect, that's the problem.

I explained all this in much more detail in the [workshops](#) and [youtube video](#) I posted earlier. The similes also make it clear (to me) that the senses are abandoned.

See [here](#) for my translation of the passage:

[By abandoning the hindrances and 5 senses] you drenched, suffused, filled, and pervaded your *experience* with delight and bliss caused by the separation [from the 5 senses], so that there is no single part of your whole experience that is not pervaded with it.

I do admit that the suttas aren't as clear about this as I could have hoped. But there are a lot of preconceptions about them, which makes people not see alternative interpretations. This is especially unfortunate if those people can only read English translations.

5 Likes

[Preston](#) 54 June 16, 2023, 2:20pm

Sunyo:

Thanks for the clarification, Preston. 😊 I did indeed overlook the quotes, reading too quickly. But these texts also don't say that the 5 senses cease only in the formless attainments.

Hi Bhante,

My first post about the formless was in response to an interesting claim made by [@josephzizys](#) about the nature of embodiment in EBT. I have no intention of entering into the jhana debate here. I did not make a claim about the five senses being present in jhana or not (although I do disagree with what you say in your post).

Sunyo:

However, I know this may sound arrogant, but I'm sure I'm not wrong.

Heh, I'm also certain I'm not wrong about jhana and have a very different view to yours. Funny how that works isn't it? I am open to new evidence, but frankly it's very unlikely that anyone on this forum could provide something new I haven't seen already. A big issue I see in this debate (on both sides) is a lack of attention to the full semantic range of various words used related to jhana. I think for most people if they go through every single example in the canon of each word (and phrase like 'upasampajja viharati' for example) in the jhana formula without ignoring those cases that go against their interpretation and without attempting rationalization they can completely settle the debate for themselves. Probably you agree. The questions of OP would be completely answered if they did so, since these issues IMO are very clear after doing this type of word-inventory. The problem is that doing this well (and objectively) can take many hours of work.

Anyways, that's enough 'meta-jhana-debate' discussion from me.

4 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 55 June 16, 2023, 4:19pm

Thank you so much Venerable! I find your arguments really interesting.

In English, we sometimes say “I love you with all my heart”. Here, of course, “heart” should not be interpreted in the anatomical and biological sense, but in an emotional sense. I have the impression that what you’re explaining sounds like that, and it sounds really interesting to me.

1 Like

[josephzizys](#) 56 June 16, 2023, 11:13pm

Its really almost the reverse of what [@Sunyo](#) says IMO (I am sure this opinion comes as no suprise to anyone)

Thinking and pondering cease in 2nd jhana (mental)

Elation ceases in 3rd jhana (emotion)

Pain ceases in 4th jhana (hedonic tone, a “physical” phenomena, i.e harder to transcend than mere personal thought, or mental state, or whatever).

This progressive development of calm and stillness works its way down from an agitated mind, through agitated (rapturous) emotion, through to “physical” phenomena like pleasure and pain.

That the orthodox Theravada position is almost the opposite of this should be no surprise when even the pre-sectarian SN/SA corpus speaks of canonical times when the jhana tradition had been lost by the majority of monks who now claimed to be liberated by “wisdom” rather than jhana.

3 Likes

[sikkhadhamma](#) 57 June 17, 2023, 1:32am

Bhante, thank you for your reply.

Regarding AN4.113, IMHO when the Buddha used the phrase *dukkhito vā kālaṅkato vā*, we should look at it in the same way as we look at the first Noble Truth specially regarding “illness is suffering and death is suffering”. Hence, again IMHO the word *kāya* in that sutta should be understood as physical body.

In addition, I found this paragraph below in the sutta regarding Mindfulness of the Body (MN119).

... nāssa kiñci sabbāvato **kāyassa vivekajena pītisukhena** apphutaṃ hoti. Tassa evaṃ appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato ye gehasitā sarasaṅkappā te pahīyanti. Tesāṃ pahānā ajjhattameva cittaṃ santiṭṭhati sannisīdati ekodi hoti samādhīyati. Evampi, bhikkhave, bhikkhu **kāyagatāsatiṃ bhāveti**.

We can find the words *kāyassa* and *kāyagatāsatiṃ* in the paragraph above. Please tell me do you think the Buddha would use the term *kāya* in one same paragraph/context but actually He was referring to two different meanings?

Thank you in advance.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 58 June 17, 2023, 2:06am

Erik_ODonnell:

kumara:

It's hard to understand how the meaning of a word should be different because of the number.

Here are some examples in English I found on Google 😊

- Manner vs. manners
- Wood vs. woods
- Force vs. forces

'Look at the wood' vs. 'look at the woods' is probably the most straightforward one. In singular it means a piece of wood, in plural it means a forest.

I struggle to think of examples in my native Norwegian though; it probably varies from language to language how common this is. English is kind of a hot mess let's be honest 😊

No doubt that's true for English. However let's get back to the specific case.

As someone who pm'd me said it well,

... the plural of kama in some cases/suttas equivalent to kamaguna. I'd stand by this in spite of [AN 6.63](#) which says they are different, but [AN 6.63](#) also implies that kama in the plural means "desires". So [AN 6.63](#) is an example where kama in the singular and plural has the same meaning, but there are suttas where that isn't the case. [AN 6.63](#) is an example of how the plural of kama has to be evaluated on a case by case basis.

This clearly shows the need to switch meanings so as to fit into a particular view of jhana.

Apart from those in the Aj Brahm school of thought and those who go by the Visuddhimagga's idea of jhana, I don't know of anyone who accepts that plural definition kama in Margaret Cone's dictionary.

1 Like

[Pondera](#) 59 June 17, 2023, 3:09am

Greetings Bhante,

You mention:

Sunyo:

"When the *mind* is full of rapture" doesn't rhyme with "their *body* gets drenched, steeped, filled, and spread with piti". But the word 'body' is incorrect, that's the problem.

The body is the main problem associated with existence and renewed existence IMO.

It is said that our bodies are our past kamma. And it is said that we are heirs to our kamma.

I see release from the body as a direct correlate to the abandoning of the perceptions. And as the highest attainment (ie. Nirodha Samapatti).

Perception and *Mind* are bond servants of the body.

The Buddha said:

"Reverend, I say it's not possible to know or see or reach the end of the world by traveling to a place where there's no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn. But I also say there's no making an end of suffering without reaching the end of the world. For it is in this

fathom-long carcass with its perception and mind that I describe the world, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation.

AN4.45

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 60 June 17, 2023, 6:35am

Preston:

I think you missed them, or are just commenting on what I said about the formula itself. Anyways, here you go from [MN 43](#):

If one knew & entered a samma samadhi (jhana) without losing it, they will be at least a non returner or higher (if not an Arahant). I doubt anyone has reached this level nowadays.

I suggest keep practice till one has the true knowledge & of course verify it.

Only 4th jhana will completely settle all physical discomfort because the five senses are well purified and can let go & know the ayatana. This is also when one has stop breathing (i.e. breathing cease). No/little breathing, body will automatically balance/cool.

Here is the passage which show the physical body is **not yet** perfected cool (passadhi) before 4th Jhana on MN 127 due to impurities (i.e. hindrances).

Keyword is:

kāyaduṭṭhullampi na suppaṭippassaddham

...

For by means of a simile some wise people understand the meaning of what is said.

Upamāyapidhekacce viññū purisā bhāsitaṣṣa atthaṃ ājānanti.

Suppose **an oil lamp** was **burning with impure oil** and **impure wick**.

Seyyathāpi, āvuso kaccāna, telappadīpassa jhāyato telampi aparisuddham vaṭṭipi aparisuddhā.

Because of the impurity of the oil and the wick it **burns dimly**, as it were.

So telassapi aparisuddhattā vaṭṭiyāpi aparisuddhattā andhandham viya jhāyati;

In the same way, take some mendicant who meditates determined on pervading ‘corrupted radiance’.

evameva kho, āvuso kaccāna, idhekacco bhikkhu ‘saṅkiliṭṭhābhā’ti pharitvā adhimuccitvā viharati,

Their physical discomfort is not completely cooled, their dullness and drowsiness is not completely eradicated, and their restlessness and remorse is not completely eliminated. tassa **kāyaduṭṭhullampi na suppaṭippassaddhaṃ** hoti, **thinamiddhampi** na susamūhataṃ hoti, **uddhaccakukkuccampi** na suppaṭivinītaṃ hoti.

Because of this they practice absorption dimly, as it were.

So kāyaduṭṭhullassapi na suppaṭippassaddhattā thinamiddhassapi na susamūhatattā uddhaccakukkuccassapi na suppaṭivinītattā andhandhaṃ viya jhāyati.

When their body breaks up, after death, they’re reborn in the company of the gods of corrupted radiance.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 61 June 17, 2023, 7:45am

Preston:

I have no intention of entering into the jhana debate here. I did not make a claim about the five senses being present in jhana or not (although I do disagree with what you say in your post).

Hey, preston, that’s understandable. Sorry for implying something you didn’t say. But when you said “the 5 senses ceasing in the formless” I read it as ceasing only at that moment. Because we also don’t say that the “hindrances cease in the formless”; we say they cease in the first jhana. With the topic at hand being whether there is physical sensation in the jhanas or not, I hope you can see why I replied as I did.

Preston:

Heh, I’m also certain I’m not wrong about jhana and have a very different view to yours. Funny how that works isn’t it?

Lol. True. As soon as I pressed ‘post’ I kinda knew I shouldn’t have posted the last line, but I saw you were already replying. I didn’t want to edit my post anymore.

Anyway, I actually disagree that “they can completely settle the debate for themselves” by reading the suttas. That’s why I said that last thing, actually. Because the suttas can clearly be interpreted both ways. Only experience will settle the debate.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 62 June 17, 2023, 7:49am

DeadBuddha:

Thank you so much Venerable! I find your arguments really interesting.

In English, we sometimes say “I love you with all my heart”. Here, of course, “heart” should not be interpreted in the anatomical and biological sense, but in an emotional sense. I have the impression that what you’re explaining sounds like that, and it sounds really interesting to me.

That’s nice to hear. And yes, it is a bit like that, but not completely. Because *kāya* just can’t be translated with a single word. It doesn’t mean ‘touching the highest truth with the body’ in Pāli either. Because *kāya* doesn’t mean ‘body’ in this instance. (And likewise in the jhana similes.)

I would like to say again that if you have any doubt about whether in the jhanas there is physical sensation or not, it probably doesn’t really matter as long as you don’t “give up” on the deeper states of mind, which some people believe are attained only at the arūpas. Just practice for their “arūpas”, and you’ll be safe either way, as you implied earlier. 🤔

To come back to your original question, to which I replied:

Sunyo:

In my understanding, in jhanas 1, 2 and 3 there is no pain, either physical or mental, there is only piti and/or sukha.

This is also the understanding of the suttas:

“And where does the arisen pain (*dukkha*) faculty cease without remainder? Here, bhikkhus, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the *first jhana*”. (SN48.40, Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation)

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 63 June 17, 2023, 7:53am

josephzizys:

pre-sectarian SN/SA corpus speaks of canonical times when the jhana tradition had been lost by the majority of monks who now claimed to be liberated by “wisdom” rather than jhana

Hey joseph, You're very reliable, because I can always trust upon you to disagree with me! haha 😄

This “liberated by wisdom” is commonly thought to refer to somebody who is liberated through the four jhanas, not needing the arūpas. So in that case jhana didn't get lost.

And if anything has gotten lost, I would argue it's because people made it easier, because they lowered the bar. The kind of “jhana” some people teach nowadays can't really get lost because most people can attain them with relative ease.

In fact, today between pindapat and lunch I had 5 minutes to meditate and I attained the “fourth jhana” according to some descriptions. 🌀 (or according to how I understand them)

2 Likes

[Pondera](#) 64 June 17, 2023, 7:59am

Joe.C:

If one knew & entered a samma samadhi (jhana) without losing it, they will be at least a non returner or higher (if not an Arahant). I doubt anyone has reached this level nowadays.

Where did you acquire this claim? According to the following table, there is a wide range of rebirths available to those with jhana attainment.

<https://www.accesstoinight.org/ptf/dhamma/sagga/loka.html>

None of those states automatically imply non-returning.

On the same subject, those practicing “brahmavihara” can, if they understand it well and practice it well, abide in:

- the retinue of Brahma (also attained by those who have rudimentary attainment of 1st Jhana) - for metta
- the Abhassara devas (for Karuna)

- the Subhakinha devas (for Mudita)
- the Vehapphala devas (Upekkha)

See: AN4.125

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 65 June 17, 2023, 8:08am

sikkhadhamma:

Hence, again IMHO the word *kāya* in that sutta should be understood as physical body.

Hey, again! 🙄

But also said to be experienced “with the *kāya*” are “the deathless”, “the formless states”, and so on. I think you’ll agree it doesn’t mean ‘with the body’ there.

sikkhadhamma:

Please tell me do you think the Buddha would use the term *kāya* in one same paragraph/context but actually He was referring to two different meanings?

Ah! That sutta is actually the best argument against “disembodied” jhanas, and I’m happy you brought it up. 😊

If this is what the Buddha himself said, then yes, it would be awkward to interpret this with one meaning of *kāya* as ‘experiencer’ and the other as ‘body’.

However, the jhanas fit very poorly into the overall sutta. [I explained it in some length in this other topic](#). Consider for example:

“After you get fully separated from sensual experiences and unskillful states of mind, you attain the first jhana [...] As you meditate like this, being diligent, motivated, and energetic, you will abandon worldly memories and intentions [i.e. the hindrances]. Once they are abandoned, your mind gets fixed, settles down, reaches oneness, and unifies internally.”

This say that you abandon the hindrances and attain the first jhana, after which as a result you abandon the hindrances and attain the first jhana. That makes no sense. Something is off here.

I think the passage of the jhanas is inauthentic and only included because of the word *kāya*. The more authentic version of mindfulness of the body is taught in the Satipatthana Sutta, where the jhanas are missing.

The similes for the jhanas (which speak about “the *kāya* (experience) filled with *pīti*”) are quite rare in the canon. They occur in DN2, MN39, and MN77, the Chinese parallels of which ALL lack the similes! Clearly the Theravada tradition had a tendency to add these similes to suttas which originally didn’t have them.

They are also in MN119, the sutta you’re referring to. But here it is *also* different from the Chinese. Because in the Chinese the jhana *similes* are included but the jhanas themselves are not. Strange. Again, it’s inconsistent and broken.

The last instance in the Pali canon is AN5.28, which to me seems the only authentic discourse with these similes, and it’s no surprise that it’s the shortest of all of them. Now interestingly, this text has three similes on “able to realize” which are found *only* here and in MN119. A coincidence? I don’t think so. I think, although we can never be sure, that MN119 is an “accidental” mix of the Satipatthana section on mindfulness of the body together with AN5.28. It was done by somebody else than the Buddha.

It could have been done on purpose as well. Scholars agree that the Pali texts have been edited, and one of the clearest aspects of editing is this sort of thing, where passages are linked together in inauthentic ways. We can derive this from comparing the Pali to the Chinese, for example. It happens quite a lot, especially in the longer texts like DN and MN. Normally such inauthentic inclusions don’t create any problems, so we almost never notice them, but in MN119 they do cause an issue.

See also Ven. Sujato’s “history of mindfulness”. It doesn’t address MN119 as far as I recall, but it does show some of these principles with respect to the Satipatthana sutta.

Yes, you have a good point, but study how ill the jhanas fit into the sutta, and you may see it from my perspective.

[Joe.C](#) 66 June 17, 2023, 8:28am

Pondera:

Where did you acquire this claim? According to the following table, there is a wide range of rebirths available to those with jhana attainment.

Are we talking about Samma Samadhi (right view + perfected precepts with all the N8FP) or other/ Micha samadhi?

If you are referring to other/Micha Samadhi, how can you use Buddha teaching to verify it? It is not possible. Because Buddha only teach samma samadhi (path & result/ wisdom).

keyword:

aparihīno

not to lose it. (not going to lower life - sensual realm)

AN 4.125

... If they dwell in that, are committed to it, and live on it often **without losing it**, when they die they're reborn in the company of the gods of Brahmā's Host.

...

An ordinary person stays there until the lifespan of those gods is spent, then they go to hell or the animal realm or the ghost realm.

But **a disciple of the Buddha stays there** until the lifespan of those gods is spent, then **they're extinguished in that very life**. (Non return for any ariya that able to maintain jhana till end of life.

btw, you might also want to check AN 4.123, AN 4.124, AN 4.125, AN 4.126 for different variety of possibility for samma samadhi & micha samadhi result.

For other reference, in AN 3.86, it is described that only a non returner of higher has perfected samma samadhi. Even a sotapanna are not capable to lives in jhana till end of life yet.

Take another case of a mendicant who has **fulfilled** their **ethics and samadhi**, but has limited wisdom.

...

With the ending of the five lower fetters they're reborn spontaneously. They are extinguished there, and are not liable to return from that world. (**non return**)

Take another case of a mendicant who has **fulfilled** their **ethics, samadhi, and wisdom**.

...

They realize the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom in this very life. And they live having realized it with their own insight due to the ending of defilements. (**arahant**)

so, Only an Ariya who is non returner or higher can know **FOR SURE** what the real Samma Samadhi is. A Puthujjana will never know yet, let alone a stream enterer who is still living with sensual pleasure (**See** MN 14).

This is why you will see many conflicting argument. Possibly an overestimation or completely blind (aka clueless).

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 67 June 17, 2023, 9:00am

kumara:

As someone who pm'd me said it well,

Hello again Bhante, 🙏

I know you quoted Erik, but I'm going to jump in here, since you addressed the points I made as well.

Which instance of the plural *kāma* in AN6.63 are you referring to? I'm not sure if I see it. Please clarify.

Either way, if it's there, I would almost call it the exception that proves the rule. Let's assume there's one (or a few) instance in the canon of *kāmā* in the plural meaning 'desires'. Then considering the dozens of times where it refers to the objects, chances are pretty small it refers to desires in the jhana formula.

But your contact has a good point regardless, namely that context determines the meaning, as I also said. But context determines the number as well, so these things are not unrelated.

kumara:

This clearly shows the need to switch meanings so as to fit into a particular view of jhana.

I agree, but who are guilty of doing that, that's the question.

So let's consider some contexts instead of just the number. I'll share my own translations because Bodhi as well as Sujato translate *kāmā* and *kāmasukha* both as 'sensual pleasure', which is not wrong per se, but it is somewhat confusing in this case.

First sutta for context:

“Udāyī, there are the objects of the five senses (*kāmaguṇa*). What five? Sights that can be seen with the sense of sight, sounds that can be heard with the sense of hearing, odors that can be smelt with the sense of smell, flavors that can be tasted with the sense of taste, and tangibles that can be felt with the sense of touch, that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, sensual, and alluring. Those are the objects of the five senses.

The pleasure and happiness coming from these objects of the five senses is called sensual pleasure (*kāmasukha*), shitty pleasure, common pleasure, and ignoble pleasure. That kind of pleasure you should not pursue, develop, or cultivate. You should fear that kind of pleasure, I tell you.

After you get fully separated (*vivicc’eva*) from sensory experiences (*kāmehi*) and unskillful qualities, you attain the first jhana, where there is delight and bliss caused by the separation, to which the mind moves and holds on.

That is what is meant by the pleasure of renunciation, the pleasure of separation, the pleasure of peace, and the pleasure of awakening. That kind of pleasure you should pursue, develop, and cultivate. You should not fear that kind of pleasure, I tell you.” (MN66)

It seems clear to me that *kāma* in “separated from sensory experiences (*kāmehi*)” refers to the objective experiences mentioned only two sentences before, not to “desires”.

Similarly:

“And what is physical delight? The delight that arises dependent on these objects of the five senses (*kāmaguṇa*), that is what is meant by physical delight.

And what is non-physical delight? Then, after you get fully separated from sensory experiences (*kāmehi*) and unskillful states of mind, you attain the first jhana, where there is delight and bliss caused by the separation, to which the mind moves and holds on. After the moving and holding subside, you attain the second jhana, where the mind is confident within and at one, not moving or holding on, so there is just delight and bliss caused by the unification. That is what is meant by non-physical delight.” (SN36.31)

This also aligns with *pīti* in context of *samādhi* being called *pītimana* in various different contexts, meaning “with a delighted mind”. Not body.

In the same vein (quoting Sujato because I haven’t translated this text):

"The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation (*kāmaguṇa*) is called sensual pleasure (*kāmasukha*). There are those who would say that this is the highest pleasure and happiness that sentient beings experience. But I don't acknowledge that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure that is finer than that.

And what is that pleasure? It's when a mendicant, quite secluded from sensual pleasures (*kāmehi*), secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. This is a pleasure that is finer than that." (SN36.19)

This is how I read this: The bliss and happiness of jhanas is better than the best sex, music, food, bodily feelings, smells, sights, and so forth, because they are pure *mental* experiences of bliss. I don't understand how the *pīti* and *sukha* would be more pleasant *bodily* experiences than the most pleasant *bodily* experiences...

So also here "secluded from sensual pleasures" refers to the objects of the senses. This is also why the jhanas, as I said before, are called "the bliss of seclusion" from the five senses, "rapture and bliss born of seclusion" from the five senses.

Anyway, I don't want to talk about *kāma* all day :D, so I'll just leave it at those three examples. But there are more, I recall, which are just as direct.

In short, it's not only the number indicates that *kāmehi* means not desire but the objects; the contexts do as well—even more clearly so, I would say.

Apart from those in the Aj Brahm school of thought and those who go by the Visuddhimagga's idea of jhana, I don't know of anyone who accepts that plural definition *kāma* in Margaret Cone's dictionary.

I don't see how that would matter. What the majority of people think is often not the right thing, anyway. Wrong ideas prevail on about every aspect of Buddhism. The Buddha also warned specifically that *samadhi*, of all factors of the path, is the thing that if not appreciated in later times would lead to the decline of the dhamma. (Sorry can't remember the sutta, somewhere in AN.)

But (whether they base it on the number or context of *kāmehi*) we can add also the Pali-English dictionary, because it interprets *viviceva kāmehi* in the 'objective sense'. So does Cone, indeed. And so does the Critical Pali Dictionary. That's the three most comprehensive dictionaries of Pāli all saying the same.

We can add the majority of translators as well, like I.B. Horner, Walsh, and also Bhikkhu Bodhi, who all translate "*kāmehi*" in the objective sense in the jhana formula, and in the plural. Only Thanissaro

has “sensuality”, which is not a plural and also rather vague. (In the first jhana formula he also seems to have overlooked a grammatical detail about *pītisukha*, which is an adjective here, not a noun.)

So its not just “those in the Aj Brahm school of thought and those who go by the Visuddhimagga”. It is the majority interpretation it seems, in scholarly circles, anyway. There’s also plenty of people who practice the deep jhana both inside and outside Theravada.

I still would like to learn how you interpret *vivicceva kāmehi*, by the way, bhante. So far I’m doing almost all of the talking, but I don’t think the burden of proof is on me (or Erik) anymore.



3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 68 June 17, 2023, 9:07am

Joe.C:

Only 4th jhana will completely settle all physical discomfort

Hey Joe,

That is not so, because the text you quoted says, “Their physical discomfort is not completely cooled, their dullness and drowsiness is not completely eradicated, and their restlessness and remorse is not completely eliminated.” Since they still haven’t abandoned the hindrances of dullness and restlessness, they are still not in the first jhana. So they definitely aren’t in the third jhana, as you suggest.

Already in the first jhana all physical discomfort is given up:

It’s when a mendicant—due to the seclusion from attachments, the giving up of unskillful qualities, and *the complete settling of physical discomfort*—quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the *first* absorption, (MN66)

2 Likes

[sikkhadhamma](#) 69 June 17, 2023, 9:45am

But, Bhante, isn't in AN4.113 the Buddha speaks about this: There are certain people who gets moved and realise for themselves that their bodies are **also** liable to sickness and death, which accords with: liable to impermanence, to wearing away and erosion, to breaking up and destruction (DN2). And then they also realise that when it happens, for them it will be a suffering.

By the way, AN5.28 is a great sutta indeed! Thank you for telling me about it.

Last but not least, do you have any list of the suttas that are deemed as inauthentic?

1 Like

[Pondera](#) 70 June 17, 2023, 9:59am

Joe.C:

Are we talking about Samma Samadhi (right view + perfected precepts with all the N8FP) or other/ Micha samadhi?

I don't know "micha"?

Joe.C:

If you are referring to other/Micha Samadhi, how can you use Buddha teaching to verify it?

I'm referring to the table. The table outlines various births possible with jhana attainment (= samma samadhi)

Joe.C:

btw, you might also want to check [AN 4.123](#), [AN 4.124](#), [AN 4.125](#), [AN 4.126](#) for different variety of possibility for samma samadhi & micha samadhi result.

Thank you 🙏

Joe.C:

This is why you will see many conflicting argument. Possibly an overestimation or completely blind (aka clueless).

There certainly are a lot of conflicting opinions/interpretations.

I've let go of the desire (personally speaking) to attain jhana (after years of searching for the solution to the formula).

I cultivate *happiness* on a daily basis. I have my own "spiritual" routine I follow. It keeps me satisfied and busy trying to be a better person everyday ... better to my wife, my coworkers ... better at my job ... tolerating disappointment and dissatisfaction.

The goal of jhana is lofty. Some days I tell myself I have it. Other days I am not so sure. And so, what I do in fact have, I try not to label. I try to make it as pure a form of virtue and personal conduct that I can.

Having said that, I do enjoy Buddhism on an intellectual level.

3 Likes

[kumara](#) 71 June 17, 2023, 10:22am

Sunyo:

I know you quoted Erik, but I'm going to jump in here, since you addressed the points I made as well.

I didn't quote Erik.

Sunyo:

Which instance of the plural *kāma* in [AN6.63](#) are you referring to? I'm not sure if I see it. Please clarify.

Better let that person respond, if he chooses to.

Your questions are best answered by reading my book.

1 Like

[alaber](#) 72 June 17, 2023, 11:38am

DeadBuddha:

if jhâna is total absorption without physical sensation

There is not one sutta that says that the body is “dead” in jhana.

Instead it is the opposite it is thanks to the physical sensations that one knows in which jhana they are in.

The physical sensations are experienced as sukha (pleasure) in jhanas 1 to 3 and as the full sensation of the skin in every part of the body in jhana 4.

3 Likes

[Preston](#) 73 June 17, 2023, 2:34pm

Sunyo:

I hope you can see why I replied as I did.

Yes, it makes sense in context of the discussion overall.

Sunyo:

Because the suttas can clearly be interpreted both ways. Only experience will settle the debate.

I disagree Bhante. Some things are incorrect. People’s view clinging can cause the myriad different interpretations that we have about jhana, and many do not do the boring and careful structured word analysis I mentioned before. I’m not just talking about just reading the suttas though (that isn’t structured enough for most to answer the relevant questions), so maybe it’s too high a standard idk. It really is amazing how easy it is for one’s “logic” to be pressed into service of one’s views. Reading the jhana debates are a good way to see the danger in views in general. To be clear I see strong view clinging on both sides of this discussion.

I think it’s a general tendency of kind-hearted people to make claims about both sides having valid views or interpretations. But honestly, just because to a group of people a certain quote or idea “looks” a certain way does not mean they have a valid interpretation. For example to some, certain quotes from the suttas look like an assertion of self. This is wrong, and we have no reason to call this a valid interpretation even if the person is kind-hearted and wise. Even if many kind-hearted and wise people say so!

Also it's ok if we believe people with a differing view of jhana are incorrect. It doesn't mean we need to be hostile or even (more extremely) believe there's no hope for their practice. You can believe I'm totally wrong as well if you like Bhante. I don't mind. Being highly confident is also not the same thing as view-clinging, and doesn't preclude respect.

As for referring to 'experience', I don't think this solves the problem either. Just because our personal meditation develops in a certain skillful way doesn't mean that our personal meditation must be jhana. It could be something else, for example a formless state. Even if we think something like "I see no way for someone to abandon sensuality without this type of samadhi", it is still biased by what works for us and ignoring the possibility that others can succeed with a different style. It takes a combination of experience and understanding to find jhana in our own world of experience, but it is totally possible IMO for someone to carefully do the type of analysis I mentioned before and identify the nature of jhana prior to the experience of it. Actually without first doing an analysis **which is independent** of what one experiences on a cushion, one is liable to read their own experiences into the suttas. This is instead of letting the suttas inform one's experience, and determine what 'label' should be applied to whatever samadhi is experienced.

Anyways, that's a lot about meta-discussion. I'd like to stop posting about this here as its a bit off-topic (and it's my fault), but if you want to PM to me please feel free.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 74 June 17, 2023, 5:05pm

Oh thank you Venerable, I didn't know this sutta, it's fascinating and very interesting!

However, I have 3 remarks to make:

1/ according to Pa-Auk, jhanas require concentration on unreal concepts (parikamma nimitta, uggaha nimitta, patibhaga nimitta) and is impossible by vipassana (because real objects are too unstable to establish jhanic concentration). Yet Uppaṭṭipāṭikasutta sutta speaks of attaining the jhānas through vipassana. This seems to run counter to the jhana Pa-Auk.

2/ Uppaṭṭipāṭikasutta says that sukha is surrendered at the third jhana whereas the normal suttas say that there is sukha at the third jhana. According to the article "Clarification on Feelings in Buddhist Dhyāna/Jhāna Meditation" (Tsefu Kuan), Theravadin say that sukha exists in the third jhāna as mental happiness, and sukha disappears in the third jhana as bodily physical happiness. So, for me, this implies there could be sukha as bodily physical happiness as early as the first or second jhāna. This implies that the first or second jhāna are not necessarily absorptions.

3/ According to the article “Clarification on Feelings in Buddhist Dhyāna/Jhāna Meditation” (Tsefu Kuan), there is at least one other version of this sutta, and it is called “Aviparitaka sutra”.

Unfortunately, this sutra has been lost, but its contents are quoted in late treatises (the sutra itself, however, is not said to be late, and dates back to the time of the Nikayas). The sutra reads as follows in many treatises : “The dejection

(*daurmansya, Pali domanassa) faculty ceases without remainder in the first dhyana. The pain (*duh. kha, Pali dukkha) faculty ceases without remainder in the second dhyana. The joy (*saumanasya, Pali somanassa) faculty ceases without remainder in the third dhyana. The pleasure (*sukha) faculty ceases without remainder in the fourth dhyana.” Here, pain is not eliminated during the first jhana, which poses a problem for the interpretation that the first jhana is an absorption.

What do you think of these remarks? In what way are they wrong?

I write these remarks taking them as mere hypotheses. In truth, I don’t know, I’m suspending judgment. But my impression, my feeling, is that the Buddha’s jhānas are not absorptions.

But in any case, as you say, the safest thing is to practice the visuddhimagga jhānas, because you can be sure that the level of concentration is sufficient to free yourself.

Thank you again for the time you devote to transmitting your knowledge to help others.

[Joe.C](#) 75 June 17, 2023, 10:33pm

Sunyo:

It’s when a mendicant—due to the seclusion from attachments, the giving up of unskillful qualities, and *the complete settling of physical discomfort*—quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the *first* absorption, ([MN66](#))

Looks like you misquoted it. It is in MN 64.

You forget to quote the front part about **giving up the five lower fetters**. This is only for non return or above who has settling the physical discomfort (completely let go sensual realm here and now, no need to wait till the death of body), because they have broken the five lower fetters with wisdom.

Again text sometimes didn’t show that things can happen in parallel. It may look like it is a series of step, but it is not.

Only 4th jhana & above are unshakable. The 1st-3rd jhana are shakable.

And what, Ānanda, is the path and the practice for **giving up the five lower fetters**? It's when a mendicant—due to the seclusion from attachments, the giving up of unskillful qualities, and the complete settling of physical discomfort. ...

As I said the implication from Sutta is that only a non return and above can teach samma sati/samadhi due to their knowledge/wisdom. The rest unfortunately can't. Nowadays, monk over estimate without checking all factors. Do they even have the 4 factors of stream enterer or not?

Sunyo:

Since they still haven't abandoned the hindrances of dullness and restlessness, they are still not in the first jhana. So they definitely aren't in the third jhana, as you suggest.

Let me ask you. Are you saying that the beings in MN 127 are not in Jhana all the time?

- gods of limited radiance
- gods of limitless radiance
- gods of corrupted radiance
- gods of pure radiance

If they are not in jhana perception (Rupa Sanna), are they in sensual realm perception (kama sanna)? Because there is only 1 sanna/perception can manifest in each being attention. With this question answer, maybe I know how you have understood the jhana.

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 76 June 17, 2023, 10:42pm

Pondera:

I've let go of the desire (personally speaking) to attain jhana (after years of searching for the solution to the formula).

If one has known jhana, one will let go family (wife, kids), houses, any materials, money, gold, work, eating too much, body, any related to sensual worlds (human + the 6 sensual deva worlds). Why? Because of this explanation from Buddha in MN 14.

Mahānāma, there is a quality that remains in you that makes you have such thoughts. For if you had given up that quality **you would not still be living at home and enjoying sensual pleasures**. But because you **haven't given up that quality** you are still living at home and enjoying sensual pleasures.

Sensual pleasures give little gratification and much suffering and distress, and they are all the more full of drawbacks.

Even though **a noble disciple has clearly seen this with right wisdom**, so long as they **don't achieve the rapture and bliss that are apart from sensual pleasures and unskillful qualities**, or something even more peaceful than that, they **might still return to sensual pleasures**.

But when they do achieve that rapture and bliss, or something more peaceful than that, they **will not return to sensual pleasures**.

Note: This is only for an ariya (stream enterer and/or possibly once returner)

Jhana can be tested as well from checking the senses.

Pondera:

I don't know "micha"?

sorry I meant Miccha (wrong samadhi).

Pondera:

I cultivate *happiness* on a daily basis. I have my own "spiritual" routine I follow. It keeps me satisfied and busy trying to be a better person everyday ... better to my wife, my coworkers ... better at my job ... tolerating disappointment and dissatisfaction.

The path is gradual, Don't try too hard. As long as it lead to happiness that doesn't cause your own sufferings and other beings sufferings. You are still doing fine.

As Buddha said in DN 9.

I teach the Dhamma for the giving up of these three kinds of birth: 'When you practice accordingly, **corrupting qualities will be given up** in you and **cleansing qualities will grow**. You'll achieve and live in the fullness and abundance of wisdom, having realized it with your own insight in this very life.'

...

Corrupting qualities will be given up and cleansing qualities will grow. One will achieve and live in the fullness and abundance of wisdom, having realized it with one's own insight in this very life. And there will be only joy and happiness, tranquility, mindfulness and awareness. **Such a life is blissful.**

PS: Remember if you practice N8FP, but your life is still miserable, somethings are very wrong with your practice. Time to check again.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 77 June 18, 2023, 1:01am

Hi, here's what I think:

1. The Uppaṭipāṭikasutta (SN48.40) talks about contemplating pain and happiness, but it doesn't explain any more than other suttas *how* they attain the jhanas. It doesn't say that their contemplation directly leads into the jhanas. The explanation of how to attain jhana is still the same as always: abandoning the hindrances and sense objects. I'm not sure what Pa-Auk would mean by "unreal concepts", though, so I can't respond on that. If it means mental objects, then yes I would agree that is what has to happen eventually. But there is nothing unreal about those things. If anything, it's more real than anything in the physical world. Also, contemplation and other types of meditation lead us there, so I wouldn't make a hard distinction, whether we call it "real" and "unreal" or whatever.
2. It's a bit strange, yes. The sutta says sukha is abandoned in the 3rd jhana, where there is still sukha! 🙄 Well, it clearly uses sukha in a different sense. The word does have different senses throughout the canon, so that's not particularly strange. For example, parinibbana is also a type of sukha but of course there are no feelings there, so it is not sukha of the jhanas, which is a feeling. In the Uppaṭipāṭikasutta sukha must stand for piti, since that is what is abandoned in the third jhana. A bit weird, but the sutta seems to somewhat forcefully try to fit the four "faculties" (dukkha, sukha, domanassa, somanassa) onto the four jhanas, which, because these two sets of four don't really match, in some cases is done in a somewhat creative way. Like, *domanassa*, which is said to be abandoned in the second jhana, seemingly refers to the *vitakka vicara*, which is a bit strange too. But this stretching and challenging of concepts is something that the Buddha did all the time.
3. Thanks, I haven't read that, but going by what you say, in these other treatises the pain/pleasure faculties are mixed up compared to the Pali. I think this shows my assumption, that the four don't really match the jhanas properly, and that the sutta was a creative way of categorizing

things. The main point is that it aids contemplation, not so much to explain us what the jhanas are like.

I was aware of some of the different usage of terms here, but I think for the first jhana it's still pretty clear that physical pain is abandoned already there.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 78 June 18, 2023, 2:24am

Preston:

I think it's a general tendency of kind-hearted people to make claims about both sides having valid views or interpretations.

I don't want to go into the meta here, but just to be clear: I don't say all views are valid. By "the suttas can be interpreted both ways" I just meant that people *arrive at* different interpretations, not that all interpretations are valid. That would be silly if the interpretations exclude one another, which they do in this case.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 79 June 18, 2023, 7:56am

Thank you very much Venerable.

[Joe.C](#) 81 June 18, 2023, 11:10am

DeadBuddha:

Uppaṭipāṭikasutta says that sukha is surrendered at the third jhana whereas the normal suttas say that there is sukha at the third jhana.

If you look at SN 48.37 or SN 48.36 (the analysis), you might see how Buddha describe the terms:

Sukhindriyaṃ, dukkhindriyaṃ, somanassindriyaṃ, domanassindriyaṃ, upekkhindriyaṃ.

dukkhindriyaṃ = senses physical pain (contact from eye, ear, tongue, nose, and body touch)
describe as:

And what is the senses of physical pain?
Katamañca, bhikkhave, dukkhindriyaṃ?

Physical pain, physical unpleasantness, the painful, unpleasant feeling that's born from physical contact.

Yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, kāyikaṃ dukkhaṃ, kāyikaṃ asātaṃ, **kāyasamphassaṃ** dukkhaṃ asātaṃ vedayitaṃ —

This term is referring to how to purify the mind from physical body contact & mind contact. If you tie in the MN 43, you will see the total connection instead of conflicting. Then there is connection to SN 48.40 as well.

This Sutta also clearly describe that jhana (samma Samadhi) is used when the all senses are in contact with the world. How to let go one by one to achieve higher purified mind.

Also, The SN 48.42 which clearly describe that the 5 senses recourse to the mind (mano):

What do these **five senses**, with their different scopes and ranges, have recourse to? What experiences their scopes and ranges?"

Imesaṃ nu kho, bho gotama, **pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ** nānāvisayānaṃ nānāgocarānaṃ na aññamaññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ kiṃ paṭisaraṇaṃ, ko ca nesaṃ gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhoti"ti?

...

The sense of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body.

Cakkhundriyaṃ, sotindriyaṃ, ghānindriyaṃ, jivhindriyaṃ, kāyindriyaṃ.

These **five senses**, with their different scopes and ranges, **have recourse to the mind**. And the mind experiences their scopes and ranges."

Imesaṃ kho, brāhmaṇa, pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ nānāvisayānaṃ nānāgocarānaṃ na aññamaññassa gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhontānaṃ mano paṭisaraṇaṃ, **manova** nesaṃ gocaravisayaṃ paccanubhoti"ti.

If someone say, they can't experience the physical body in jhana. They are probably in the wrong samadhi.

Sometimes, the translation just didn't make any senses at all. This is why always refer to the Pali words and look at more sutta or other Sutta that analyze it in more details. Nowadays it is easy to check the pali in the search box.

1 Like

[Nickelii](#) 82 June 18, 2023, 11:28am

Greetings Venerable. MN 111 says in jhana the further escape is discerned. What this probably means is due to right concentration the deathless is discerned. What this probably means is the vibrations of piti & sukha are felt to be disturbing. They are felt as dukkha. When sukha ends in the 4th it's dukkha also ends.

2 Likes

[elisabetta](#) 83 June 18, 2023, 11:32am

Welcome, Nickelii:

On behalf of the moderators, I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Discourse & Discover, along with the sincere wish that it benefits you on your path. If you need any assistance, please refer to the [FAQ](#) or reach out to us at @moderators.

Kind regards,
Liz

3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 84 June 19, 2023, 12:05am

Nickelii:

Greetings Venerable. [MN 111](#) says in jhana the further escape is discerned. What this probably means is due to right concentration the deathless is discerned. What this probably means is the vibrations of piti & sukha are felt to be disturbing. They are felt as dukkha. When sukha ends in the 4th it's dukkha also ends.

Hi Nickelii, welcome and thanks for joining the discussion.

When I read the sutta, it seems clear the further escape for each state is every time the next state of meditation. The escape from the first jhana is the second jhana, the third is the escape of the second, and so forth. The final escape is the cessation of awareness and what is experienced (or “perception and feelings”), after which Sāriputta concluded there is no further escape. This cessation of awareness and what is experienced is a momentary version of parinibbana, the cessation of the mind, that’s why he couldn’t find any further escape. Because there’s nothing else to cease.

You say contemplation *in* the jhanas, well, this moves the discussion from whether the jhanas are bodily or mental, to the question of whether one can contemplate *in* the jhanas. I don’t feel like going there now in much detail, but Ven. Ānalayo argued that this sutta (MN111) does *not* support the idea that one can contemplate *in* the jhanas (in Early Buddhist Meditation Studies.) One indication is that before the contemplation the sutta says: “He [Sāriputta] knew those phenomena as they arose, as they remained, and *as they went away*.” In other words, he experienced the jhana and its ending, and only then contemplated it. Only then “he understood: ‘So it seems that these phenomena, not having been, come to be; and having come to be, they flit away.’”

We have to read the sutta as a general description of Sāriputta’s practice, not as something he did in one single sitting. After all, the sutta starts with “for a fortnight he practiced”. During that time he still went on almsround and ate and stuff, surely, but that’s sort of thing is left mentioned since it’s irrelevant. It’s also irrelevant to mention that Sāriputta had to attain the first jhana again before moving on to the second.

So what happened is, Sāriputta attained the first jhana (perhaps a couple times), contemplated it, realized its limits, then developed the second jhana, for which he needed to go through the first again. As it says, he realized these things “by repeated practice”. So it wasn’t 1st jhana > contemplate > 2nd jhana > contemplate > 3rd jhana, and so forth. It was more like, 1st jhana > come out of 1st jhana > contemplate > 1st jhana again > come out again > contemplate again > 1st jhana again > 2nd jhana > come out of 2nd jhana > contemplate > etc.

For example, the 2nd jhana is a further escape from the 1st jhana, and “by repeated practice” Sāriputta realized that. But only after the cessation of awareness (*saññā*) and what’s experienced (*vedayita*) did he realize that there is no further escape.

(This is another indication, by the way, that *saññā* can just mean awareness in general, and not always means mental labels or ideas, which is relevant to *kāmasaññā* we discussed earlier.)

The discourse also has some clear indications of lateness and Abhidhamma influences, but that’s yet another matter.

2 Likes

[Nickeli](#) 85 June 19, 2023, 4:08am

Thank you Venerable.

Page 163 of Ajahn Brahm's book 3rd paragraph about the 4th jhana says from the viewpoint of the 4th jhana the earlier jhana are an "affliction".

Regardless of Ajahn Brahm, the meditator with supramundane samadhi established in vossagga as the Buddha taught in SN 48.9 always has a taste of the Deathless or peace & stillness. The vibrations of rapture & bliss will feel disturbing in contrast to the peace. This experience of dukkha does not require attainment of the 4th jhana. The meditator with the proper vossagga mind will discern this disturbing quality of rapture in the 1st jhana.

Re

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 86 June 19, 2023, 1:16pm

Hi Bhante,

Sunyo:

The discourse also has some clear indications of lateness and Abhidhamma influences,

Would you be willing to clarify what the late and Abhidhammic influences are in the sutta?

For example, I've read elsewhere that the portion with *saññavedayitanirodha* itself is a late or Abhidhammic addition. Given its appearance in a number of other suttas and the contexts of those suttas, I'm dubious about this but would appreciate your input. 🙏

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 87 June 19, 2023, 3:23pm

Have you read Ānalayo's work I referred to, including the works he refers to? I'm not sure if I have much more to add.

Anyway, in particular late is the list of jhana factors which include things never mentioned in other suttas to be part of jhanas, but happening as similar lists in the Abhidhamma. I'm talking for example about "placing and keeping and rapture and bliss and unification of mind; contact, feeling, perception, intention, mind, enthusiasm, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and application of mind". The part after the semicolon at least is Abhidhammic. You can even see an indication in the Pali because the 'ca' (and) is suddenly missing: *vitakko ca vicāro ca pīti ca sukhañca cittekaggatā ca, phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittam chando adhimokkho vīriyam sati upekkhā manasikāro*.

There is no parallel to the sutta in other languages, which makes it hard to say what the original would have looked like, if there was one.

Anyway, read Ānalayo's stuff. It's for free online.

1 Like

[Erik O'Donnell](#) 88 June 19, 2023, 5:11pm

Just an open question to the thread. In a vivid dream, you can see sights or feel touches, even feel that you are in your body, moving through the dream world. In lucid dreams, you can even be aware that you're dreaming.

Do you consider this physical, or as happening in the mind sense? Is a dream a state of being absorbed away /secluded from the physical body?

The more I read and re-read these debates, I keep wondering "but what do you mean when you say X 🤔"

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 89 June 19, 2023, 8:39pm

Thanks very much, Bhante.

I'm looking forward to reading the book you recommended by Ven. Ānalayo. Haven't read that one yet.

I see what you mean about the Pāli and how it points to a later addition.



1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 90 June 19, 2023, 8:48pm

[@Sunyo](#)

Venerable, please, I'd like your opinion on the famous AN 3.63 (Venāgapura Sutta). This sutta seems to say that one can walk in jhāna. What's your opinion?
Thank you in advance.

[Ceisiwr](#) 91 June 19, 2023, 10:06pm

kumara:

In the Suttas, there's such thing as wrong samadhi, leading to wrong knowing and wrong liberation. I believe the Buddha was referring to the absorption practices.

Wrong Samadhi would be like that in DN1, where the Jhanas are clung to. So, what makes a Jhana right or wrong is how it's viewed rather than the experience itself.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 92 June 20, 2023, 12:15am

DeadBuddha:

Venerable, please, I'd like your opinion on the famous [AN 3.63](#) (Venāgapura Sutta). This sutta seems to say that one can walk in jhāna. What's your opinion?
Thank you in advance.

I didn't know this sutta was that famous. 😊 But sure, since you ask so kindly, how can I refuse? 😊
(No promises for the future, though. I spend a bit too much time on this debate already, although it's

good to have all the main arguments of both sides in one place.)

I think this sutta actually *also* provides some little evidence for the disembodied jhanas. People always focus on one particular line, but overlook some other things. I'll share my evidence at the end, first the line.

Venerable Analayo actually explains it in the same work I referred to, in footnotes on p85 and p123. Just like one can't contemplate inside the jhanas, one also can not walk when in the jhanas, is what he says. I agree with Venerable Analayo on both accounts. Analayo's footnotes are a bit terse, though, and I don't know if he explained the grammatical details elsewhere. So here's what's going on in my opinion.

First the Buddha says he's living a simple life in a forest, going for alms every day to a certain town, and that he's attaining the jhanas. (It seems like he wasn't teaching at those times.) Then there is a line which Bhikkhu Bodhi translates: "Then, brahmin, *when I am in such a state (evaṃbhūto)*, if I walk back and forth, on that occasion my walking back and forth is celestial."

Bhūto, which Venerable Bodhi translates as a present participle, is actually a *past* participle. But it is used broadly throughout the suttas, with varying meaning. Sometimes a present participle is an alright translation, but only when it has the sense of "being" in general, not "while I am in such a state" which I would say is too specific. It's more like "while I am attaining such states in my life".

So Bhante Sujato translates it as "when I'm practicing like this", by which he means the Buddha is practicing those states in general, not that he's actually in them while he's walking. That seems to align with Monier-Williams dictionary which glosses *evaṃbhūto* as "of such a quality or nature". In other words, when the Buddha is "of such a quality or nature" that he can easily attain the jhanas, then he walks "celestial".

I think Sujato's translation is better, also because the word "state" in Bodhi's "when I am in such a state" is not in the Pali. *Evaṃbhūto*, literally "been such", does not really refer to the jhanas. It refers to the Buddha himself being "such". But what is that "such"? Is it only attaining the jhanas? Only the fourth which was mentioned just before? That would be the case if we take it all as a simple sequential sequence. Or does it include the *whole* passage, including him living in the forest, going for alms and such? I see no reason why it would only refer to the jhanas, because again, *evaṃbhūto* means "while I am being such", rather than "while *these states* are such".

At the end the Buddha says: "When I'm practicing like this, if I walk, at that time my walking is heavenly. [...] if I stand, at that time my standing is heavenly. [...] if I sit, at that time my sitting is heavenly. [...] if I lie down, at that time my lying is heavenly." To me in general the *walking* refers to going on almsround (which the sutta says he does *before* attaining jhanas), the *standing* is perhaps waiting for alms, the *sitting* is the meditation, and the *lying down* is his sleeping (and you can't be in jhanas while sleeping, I think we all agree). I don't really know why else he would lie down; apart

from when he had aches in his later years, I don't think he really ever did so for other reasons than sleeping.

Alternatively and perhaps more simply, *bhūto* may also be more literally translated as a past participle, meaning “when I *have been* such”, i.e. have been in the jhanas. A somewhat similar use of *bhūto* is found in SN46.30: “For in the past, venerable sir, when I was still a householder (*agārika-bhūto*), I did not have much concern for the Dhamma or the Sangha.” Here *bhūto* refers to a past that no longer is present. The PTS Dictionary also lists under *bhūta*: “pp. in predicative use [...]: **what has been or happened**; viz *mātu-bhūtā* having been his mother.”

So, while there may be some ambiguity in *evaṃbhūto*, it's certainly not a clear home-run for the embodied jhana view.

Now, the text provides some support for the disembodied view as well. People like to bring up the one line to argue one can attain jhanas while walking, but notice when the Buddha himself describes his practice, **he doesn't actually do that!** He says: “Brahmin, when I am living supported by a village or town, I robe up in the morning and, taking my bowl and robe, enter the town or village for alms. After the meal, on my return from almsround, I enter within a forest. I gather up some grass or leaves into a pile and **sit down** cross-legged, setting my body straight, and establishing mindfulness in front of me.” Then, only after sitting down does he enter the jhanas. So we have to ask, if he could attain the jhanas while walking, why didn't he do so on the way in or out of the village? 😞 Especially if that was so strongly indicated by *evaṃbhūto* in the same sutta? 😊

Of course, this is not a clear-cut evidence for the embodied view either. Because one can argue that perhaps he just didn't feel like entering jhana while walking, or whatever. I wouldn't be convinced by that particular argument. Maybe someone has a better one. But it is at least really interesting that in the *very same sutta* used to argue that one can attain jhana while walking, the Buddha himself actually says he sits down! 😞

And that's not just here. There are a few other references where the Buddha either sits or lies down before attaining the jhanas, and none other where he's walking. I believe it is quite telling as well. Some suggest that in jhana you can walk, do all sorts of things, supposedly even when you're a puthujana. But then why would of all beings the Buddha apparently have to sit down? Again, why wasn't he in jhana while he was walking in and out of town? 😞 Well, I have answers to this, but I'm asking it of others.

In the embodied view of jhanas *vivicceva kāmehi* is interpreted to mean something like being without sense desires, or being generally aloof from some unspecified “sensuality” or just not interested in sense objects. But while walking, the Buddha already *was* away from those things. So he had already fulfilled both the prerequisites for the first jhana: *vivvicceva kāmehi* and being without the hindrances (since enlightened beings have no more hindrances). But still he wasn't in *jhāna*. Why not? 😞

I think the phrase means to be fully (*eva*) separated (*vivicca*) from sense experiences (*kāmehi*), moving the mind away from the five senses. Then, when the Buddha was on almsround, he had only fulfilled *one* of the prerequisites, being without the hindrances. To fulfill the other he had to turn his mind inwards, away from the experiences of the five sense. To do that, he had to sit down. To me, that makes sense on many levels.

I hope all this also makes sense to some others, at least to the extent that they give this kind of meditation a serious try.

PS. It would also be difficult to walk while you're not breathing. 😊 And in the fourth jhana the breath has ceased, say a handful of suttas.

3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 93 June 20, 2023, 12:28am

Erik_ODonnell:

Just an open question to the thread. In a vivid dream, you can see sights or feel touches, even feel that you are in your body, moving through the dream world. In lucid dreams, you can even be aware that you're dreaming.

Do you consider this physical, or as happening in the mind sense? Is a dream a state of being absorbed away /secluded from the physical body?

If you'd ask me, that is not at all what being secluded from the senses is like. It is impossible to explain in words what the difference is, though.

Visions in dreams, although nowadays we say they come from the mind, perhaps in the Buddha's time may have been classed under the sense of sight still. That is hypothetical, and it probably wasn't, but it *feels* to me like it should.

In dreams it almost feels like you're looking through your eyes (in mine anyway), but that's not the case in deep meditation. Often people perceive certain lights before the jhanas (as in MN128). These lights people might momentarily think are coming through the eyes, and they may even think it's going to burn their eyes, it's so bright. This is quite common for people. But they quickly realize it wasn't the eyes, and there's no problem.

But in jhana there is no such perception. It's very different. But I can't exactly tell you how it's different. 😊 Because whatever I say, you'll likely relate it to the five senses again.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 94 June 20, 2023, 12:53am

Ceisiwr:

Wrong Samadhi would be like that in [DNI](#), where the Jhanas are clung to. So, what makes a Jhana right or wrong is how it's viewed rather than the experience itself.

Well, that's possible. At the same time, by saying that, you regard them as the same kind of jhana the Buddha taught, don't you?

1 Like

[Nickelii](#) 95 June 20, 2023, 4:15am

Sunyo. I did not read anything compelling in Analayo's book. On page 123 Analayo merely offered Ajahn Brahm's opinion from a book where Ajahn Brahm often displays questionable use of terminology such as the words comprehension & contemplation. Obviously there is sampajana & anupassi in jhana per the literal definition of the 3rd jhana and per sutta such as AN 4.124. This anupassi does not mean thinking. It means closely watching & perceiving which occurs in jhana. If a jhana cannot be contemplated it cannot be later described. While in jhana the jhana is seen as not self & alien; the vibrations of rapture are seen as impermanent; the bliss of jhana is felt to be unsatisfactory compared to the stillness. These are direct anupassi in jhana.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 96 June 20, 2023, 5:21am

Nickelii:

anupassi does not mean thinking

Agree. I translate it as "one who observes", or simply "observer".

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 97 June 20, 2023, 5:41am

Hi Nickelii, 🙌

I'm afraid we're talking past one another a bit. In the post you replied to I was talking about the historical authenticity of one particular text, is this what you're concerned about or not?

Venerable Analayo also gives various other arguments for why contemplation didn't happen while Sāriputta was in the jhanas, not "merely" a note to Ajahn Brahm. May I suggest you read a bit closer. If the arguments aren't convincing, that's fine, you wouldn't be the first to think so. But, no offense, I think it's a bit unfair to reduce them to just one note. (A note which I by the way agree isn't a great argument at all, since it's a sort of an appeal to authority, and isn't about what the suttas say.)

I also don't understand why we're discussing *anupassi* all of a sudden. Who said that it means thinking, exactly? Maybe I missed it. So maybe we have to rewind a bit.

Anyway, whatever follows the jhana in the texts does not happen while one is in the jhana, is my understanding. The verb phrase is *upasampajja viharati*, literally "having attained, one dwells". This "dwelling" isn't necessarily in the jhana. You can also "dwell" or "live" in a general sense "having attained" the jhana at some point. If you attain a jhana in the morning, for example, then in the afternoon you still "dwell, having attained" the jhana.

A similar construction occurs in MN70:

"Here some person contacts (*phusitvā*) with the body and abides (*viharati*) in those liberations that are peaceful and immaterial, transcending forms, and his taints are destroyed by his seeing with wisdom." (Bodhi)

(For the discussion on bodily vs non-bodily, note also that Bodhi's "contact with the body" (*kāyena*) in the formless attainments is definitely not a right translation. I also don't like 'immaterial' because it assumes that *rūpa* = matter, which is too simplistic. I think he changed it in later translations, anyway.)

Alternative translation of same passage:

It's a person who has direct meditative experience of the peaceful liberations that are formless, transcending form. And, having seen with wisdom, their defilements have come to an end.
(Sujato)

The verbs here are *phusitvā viharati*, an identical structure, with the same meaning as *upasampajja viharati*. It means they “live” or “dwell” (*viharati*) having experienced (*phusitvā*) those formless states at some point, as Sujato has understood. Then, having experienced them, using contemplation their defilements are ended. If we’d think the verbs imply it all happens at the same time, this would mean they attained *all* the formless attainment at the same time their defilements end. That would be impossible, I think you can agree.

Likewise, when a contemplation follows the *upasampajja viharati* of the jhanas, those contemplations don’t happen at the same time one is in the jhana.

(Edit after discussion with senior monk: I now think of this a bit differently.)

If a jhana cannot be contemplated it cannot be later described.

This doesn’t make sense to me regardless of what the jhanas are. Because we can remember things. Have you never described or contemplated anything in hindsight? It’s something people tend to do all the time, and there’s nothing unique about the jhanas that makes it impossible to remember them. In fact, I’d say that is the only way to contemplate them. This is why AN5.28 says one aspect of developing right samādhi is “reviewing”. How would you interpret this?

Thanks for raising the issues. But I said before I didn’t want to go too deeply into this aspect of contemplation, and now I did it anyway. 😊 So please excuse me if this would be my last reply on the topic.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 98 June 20, 2023, 6:36am

Yes. The experience is the same. How it’s viewed (with clinging or without) is what makes them Right or Wrong. So, I wouldn’t say experience x makes Jhana Right or Wrong. Rather you could say that one is Jhana and one isn’t. Problem is both the absorbed and non-absorbed Jhana are said to be full of rapture and ease apart from sensual pleasures. Perhaps both are Jhana? Could it be that Theravada got it right with Samanatha Jhanas and Vipassana Jhanas? 🙋

1 Like

[kumara](#) 99 June 20, 2023, 7:16am

Ceisiwr:

Yes. The experience is the same.

Then you'll have to argue with Aj Brahm who says the Buddha *discovered* jhana.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 100 June 20, 2023, 7:58am

Thank you very much! I'm sorry if you're giving too much time to this debate, but your arguments are really very good and very useful to move beings forward on the path! Thank you for being so active and writing very high quality answers. I'm sure that what you write on this topic - and what the other contributors write - will help a lot of people and will be consulted by a lot of people now and in the future. Thank you again Venerable.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 101 June 20, 2023, 9:43am

kumara:

Then you'll have to argue with Aj Brahm who says the Buddha *discovered* jhana.

Happy to do so. That isn't correct, as DN 1 shows.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 102 June 21, 2023, 10:09pm

Hello Venerable,

I remember you saying that samatha and vipassana are practiced together. However, you also say that jhana is absorption without physical sensation. So what do you think samatha (jhana) looks like when practised at the same time as vipassana? A priori, in a jhâna without physical sensation,

you can't practice vipassana on physical sensation. So vipassana is practiced on something else, such as what? The jhâna factors?

I ask this question because in the Pa-Auk system, the object of jhana concentration is nimitta. Now, nimitta is considered an unreal concept (i.e. it's not an ultimate reality but just a perception). If we stop concentrating on nimitta, then there is no more jhâna. This is why Pa-Auk considers that vipassana cannot be performed in jhana: vipassana is performed on real objects, whereas samatha is performed on unreal objects.

Thanks again

1 Like

[kumara](#) 103 June 22, 2023, 12:43am

Ajahn Chah says,

Wrong samādhi is where the mind enters calm and there's no awareness at all. One could sit for two hours or even all day but the mind doesn't know where it's been or what's happened. It doesn't know anything.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 104 June 22, 2023, 2:15am

Hey, bhante. Sorry to interrupt your exchange with Ceisiwr, but that's the exact same quote I used to explain wrong samādhi in a class! 😊 Happy to see we agree on something at least!

Because maybe it's beneficial from time to time to focus on the agreement instead of the differences.

2 Likes

[sabbamitta](#) 105 June 22, 2023, 5:46am

DeadBuddha:

I remember you saying that samatha and vipassana are practiced together.

I don't remember having put it this way.

Let me put it like this: Samatha and Vipassanā are qualities developed in meditation, not *practices* or *meditation methods*.

If you practice meditation, let's say, breath meditation, or metta meditation, or even something that's called vipassana meditation (even if the Buddha didn't use that term in this form), and if you practice it well, the qualities of Samatha and Vipassanā are developed in you. And they are developed *together*; if one is growing, the other one is growing as well. You become both calmer and see clearer.

But basically, I am just repeating or paraphrasing what Ajahn Brahmali said in the essay I have linked above in this thread, and it's perhaps nicer to read it in Ajahn's own words. And also consider Venerable [@Sunyo](#)'s explanations above which are perhaps even more nuanced (I didn't read the entire thread, but am just referring to Bhante's first reply here).

There isn't anything more I have to say on the topic.

5 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 106 June 22, 2023, 5:55am

We can all quote teachers who agree with us, although I could probably find a quote from Ajahn Chah that contradicts your view Bhante. Also note that Ajahn Chah says there that samadhi with no awareness is wrong samadhi. I don't agree with that definition, but either way it's not referring to the absorbed kind of meditation since there is awareness there.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 107 June 22, 2023, 6:22am

Ceisiwr:

the absorbed kind of meditation

I've come to realized that when people use the word "absorption" for meditation, what they mean can vary quite a bit.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 108 June 22, 2023, 8:22am

Thank you very much Venerable, sorry I misunderstood your comment and thank you for taking the time to correct me.

Ven. Brahmali is very interesting and compared to other teachers I've read, he has a very original vision. I understand your comment better.

Let me try to summarize his article for those who read us.

For Ven. Brahmali, samatha (= calm, tranquility) and vipassana (= clear vision) are not practices, but results of practice. And as results of practice, samatha and vipassana are achieved progressively and together: you can't have samatha without vipassana and vipassana without samatha. This is why samatha and vipassana are inseparable. And he explains that to obtain samatha and vipassana, we need to purify our mind through sila, compassion and meditation. This purification is the source of samatha and vipassana. This is another reason why samatha and vipassana are inseparable.

1 Like

[Nickeli](#) 109 June 22, 2023, 9:44am

Hello DeadBuddha. The notion samatha & vipassana is result of practice is straight from MN 149 and was widely taught well before Ajahn Brahmali came to exist as a bhikkhu. Regards.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 110 June 22, 2023, 9:46am

Of the Theravadin/Brahm/Sujato/Buddhadasa kind.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 111 June 23, 2023, 12:20am

Analayo and Aj Thanissaro also uses “absorption”, but their understandings of it clearly differ.

I’m not sure if Aj Buddhadasa used “absorption” for meditation. A quick search on Google doesn’t show. (I did see “total *absorption* in sensuality” though, but that’s not what you’re referring to.)

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 112 June 23, 2023, 6:18am

I don’t think he did use it. I’m using it to refer to mediation that is without the 5 senses but filled with rapture and ease. I had assumed you knew the manner in which I was using it.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 113 July 3, 2023, 1:31am

Can you point to a reference on his teaching of meditation without the 5 senses?

1 Like

[Dan](#) 114 July 3, 2023, 8:39am

AN9.42 freedom from 5 senses at first jhana (line 3.9 and 4.1).

And answer to OP is that freedom from pleasure (mental) is gone to one who goes to 4th AN9.42 (line 6.5) That it is “*upekkhāsukham*” - pleasure with equanimity - is abandoned - as it’s a confinement.

The way I guess / interpret - the faculty of being able to distinguish pleasure and associated equanimity - is seen as requiring energy to maintain and one who enters 4th recognises that as confining, thus drops all recognition of pleasure or displeasure - less things to be “equanimous” with

4 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 115 July 3, 2023, 9:57am

Dan:

[AN9.42](#) freedom from 5 senses at first jhana (line 3.9 and 4.1).

It's freedom from sensual pleasures, not the 5 senses.

4 Likes

[Dan](#) 117 July 3, 2023, 10:07am

I see, I take it to mean freedom from the noun - (each of the senses) the adjective to the noun is "viññeyyā" that (thanks to suttacentral translation tools) as in the ear sotaviññeyyā [sota] 1. the ear. (masculine) viññeyya - 1. to be perceived

So, to make up a noun, I read that as the confinement is that-to-be-percieved-ear-wise, to-be-percieved-eye-wise that-to-be-percieved-nose-wise, etc that are otherwise pleasurable, agreeable, enticing, etc

Maybe the buddha just pitched at the right level so we got on with it ... hehe (I think there's an issue though - I don't know pali - so I'll bow out)

EDIT: It may be conceptually distinct, but it seems practically and in practice equivalent. Like how if you keep your eyes still long enough - parts of the room disappear (stare at a dot on a wall for 20 minutes - detail in wall disappears, periphery disappears and sometimes the dot disappears - then to "regain" the visual input all you have to do is move your eyes) - this is a "mundane" example of how the stillness makes things disappear in sensory world. Or how stillness makes things disappear in the neurological world (don't quote me but I believe is neurons in the eye unstimulated that makes this phenomena). One way is to not be moving those eyes getting enticed by different sights. Can you imagine the self-confidence and coolness to do this with all the senses and all the habitual patterns and knots between them like thoughts? (maybe that's the 7 parts of the path to first jhana) What if all jhanas were degrees of stillness that switch things off in the mind? and facility with not having neurons always automatically fire a certain way in a variety of contexts - the freedom from fetters?) Anyway speaking way above my pay grade here so I'll bow out now - nice to share some dhamma chanda with you.

3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 118 July 3, 2023, 12:54pm

Ceisiwr:

It's freedom from sensual pleasures, not the 5 senses.

Well, that depends on how we read it. To me the Pali does not necessarily want to limit "the five kinds of sensual stimulation" (*kāmagūṇa*) only to pleasant sights, sounds, etc. Rather, it seems to say that all sights and sounds can be seen as pleasant. Because quite literally it says:

Sights known by the eye: likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing.

That is to say, it does not use a restrictive pronoun such as "that" in "sounds that are likable". The Critical Pāli Dictionary also defines the *kāmaguṇā* as " viz. rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, poṭṭhabba," i.e. just as sights, sounds, etc. regardless of whether they are pleasant.

That may be because everything can be likeable to some people. In the Magandiyasutta (MN75) a leper is burning his skin with glowing coals and he finds that very pleasant. He "acquired a mistaken perception of it as pleasant." So what is pleasant is very personal. To the leper pain is also pleasant. *All* sense experiences can be perceived as pleasant. Where do we draw the line? In SN3.12 it is also said that "The very same sights that are agreeable to some are disagreeable to others."

(By the way, to those who don't believe that *kāma* can refer to the objects of the senses, this sutta clearly indicates that it does when it says "sights/sounds/etc are the best of the *kāmas* (sense objects)".)

With that personal aspect in mind, if in AN9.42 we interpret the confinement as only "sensual pleasures", as you suggest, what is the escape from this confinement becomes very vague and personal. That does not fit the other "openings" that follow, which are very well defined, such as the disappearance of *pīti* in the third *jhāna*, and such. I'm saying that the "confinement" for the first *jhana* must also be something very defined. And in my opinion that is what Dan suggests, namely the five senses altogether. To leave behind the five senses is the way to truly escape from these "sensual stimulations".

If the confinement would just be "sensual pleasures", it would also mean that just walking away from a sensual environment (like music or whatever) would be enough to enter this "opening amidst confinement". But that can't be the proper requirement for such elevated states of mind.

Recalling that the Buddha-to-be remembered the first *jhana* as the path to awakening, that is already a very high "opening (or per Sujato 'opportunity') amidst confinement". It seems that this

first jhāna is referred to in the verse at AN9.42:

‘The opportunity amid confinement
was discovered by the Buddha of vast intelligence,
who woke up to absorption.’

If this escape from confinement is just being away from sensual pleasures, everybody could fulfill it with ease. Then it wouldn't be praised like this, nor would it be such a particular requirement for the jhanas, mentioned not only in this sutta but also others, and in the very formula of the first jhāna as well, as I see it (“separated from sense objects”, *vivicceva kāmehi*).

As a side note, regardless of how we interpret kāmagaṇa, texts like this show that the pleasure (*sukha*) of the jhanas is *not* a bodily feeling. Because that would be “touches known by the body—likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, etc.” It would be included in the kāmagaṇa.

Notice also that specifically excluded in the “confinement” of AN9.32 are feelings of the *mind*. That is what pīti and sukha are: pleasant, likable states of mind. Hence it is also said:

The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called sensual pleasure. There are those who would say that this is the highest pleasure and happiness that sentient beings experience. But I don't acknowledge that. Why is that? Because there is another pleasure that is finer than that [i.e. a pleasure not coming from the five senses, but from the mind.]

And what is that pleasure? It's when a mendicant, quite secluded from sensual pleasures [i.e. not experiencing the five senses], secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion [from the five senses], while placing the mind and keeping it connected. (SN36.19)

It makes little sense to me if this pleasure that is finer than the pleasures of the five senses, would be a bodily feeling. For a sutta that talks about pīti in a similar way see MN99.

Notice also that here the sensual pleasure arises *from* the kāmagaṇa (the “kinds of sensual stimulation”). The sensual stimulations are not themselves the sensual pleasure. MN13 likewise says: “The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation: this is the gratification of sensual pleasures.” So the kāmagaṇa are not the pleasure, they are the objects that result in pleasure.

In SN1.30 it is also said (in verse) that: “The world has five kinds of sensual stimulation, and the mind is said to be the sixth.” So by analogy to the mind, the five kāmagaṇa refer to the five senses as a whole, not just the pleasant aspects of them.

And in MN80 that: “The pleasure and happiness that arises from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called sensual pleasure. So there is the saying: ‘From the senses comes sensual pleasure.’”

And in AN9.38: “These five kinds of sensual stimulation are called the world in the training of the noble one.” And one who has reached the first jhāna has provisionally reached the end of the world.

So I agree with Dan that AN9.42 tries to tell us that the five senses are no longer experienced in the first jhāna. But that is also in light of other discourses that point at the same idea, because it is true that kāmagaṇa isn’t super clearly defined. We can find also suttas where it seems to refer only to the pleasant aspects. However, in context of jhānas I don’t see how that makes sense.

6 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 119 July 3, 2023, 3:20pm

You are fascinating Venerable. Your arguments often seem very convincing to me. I wonder what one could counter-argue. Thank you very much Venerable.

1 Like

[Meggers](#) 120 July 3, 2023, 4:45pm

Sunyo:

what *some* people call ‘vipassana’, like scanning the body,

Can I ask a question about this? Are people using “body scanning” to refer to vipassana as taught by Goenka?

We have an interesting situation in Alberta and I am not sure how it occurred, but a lot of roughnecks from the oil patch in Fort McMurray go to vipassana retreats. I’ve spoken to a number of them, and it’s actually a very important learning experience for them to get in touch with their sensible capacities and feelings and such during their retreats, because - well working in the cold alone is bound to numb you - but the oil patch is a very masculinist, repressive culture, that offers (or at least used to) very high paychecks in exchange for the brutal life that many have no choice but to carry out there. The work camps in the bush and the city itself are awash with drugs, gambling,

women ... all the worst kinds of entertainments, and it has a really debilitating effect on all the people in gathers into it.

It must be word of mouth that got around, because they just know it's mindfulness meditation, going to be the hardest thing they've ever done in their lives, but it's so rewarding, etc. and so they go to it on their way out of their tour of duty in the patch. Quite a number of men have talked to me about how they didn't realize how numb, blunt, unattuned, repressed, sort of dead to living - and the living - they were. Even cultivating sensual perception and awareness through Goenka's vipassana is consistently reported as a huge boon to them.

You people might be intelligent, a lot of these guys aren't, and this has got to make a difference for them.

Goenka's always been controversial. I read that his organization was forced to put in their screening process when he first entered North America, way back in the 70s I think, after people leaving his retreats were having psychotic episodes, major depression, and I understand, even a couple suicides. I've heard that all the behaviours at his different centres are not consistent, so I don't know.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 121 July 3, 2023, 5:40pm

Well, that depends on how we read it. To me the Pali does not necessarily want to limits "the five kinds of sensual stimulation" (kāmagūṇa) only to pleasant sights, sounds, etc. Rather, it seems to say that all sights and sounds can be seen as pleasant. Because quite literally it says:

Sights known by the eye: likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing.

That is to say, it does not use a restrictive pronoun such as "that" in "sounds that are likable". The Critical Pāli Dictionary also defines the kāmaguṇā as " viz. rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, poṭṭhabba," i.e. just as sights, sounds, etc. regardless of whether they are pleasant.

Even without "that" this still reads that the kāmagūṇa are pleasurable sense objects. I had a look at the Critical Pāli Dictionary.

kāma-guṇa

, m. and n. (mostly) pl. [ts.; Buddh. sa. kāmaguṇa, cf. SWTF s.v.], the (five) strands of sensual

pleasure, (cf. *Sn-trsl.* II ad 50-51), i.e. the five objects of sensual pleasure viz. rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, poṭṭhabba, cf. *kāma*, q.v. s.v.; — *exeg.*: definitions of ~: pane' ime ~ā ... cakkhuviññeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā + ... sotaviññeyyā saddā ... ghānaviññeyyā gandhā ... jivhāviññeyyā rasa ... kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā,

It states that the *kāmagūṇa* are sights etc which are *manāpā* (pleasant, likeable, attractive, agreeable). I don't see how you get from "sensual pleasures" to "sense experience".

That may be because everything can be likeable to some people. In the *Magandiyasutta* ([MN75](#)) a leper is burning his skin with glowing coals and he finds that very pleasant. He "acquired a mistaken perception of it as pleasant." So what is pleasant is very personal. To the leper pain is also pleasant. All sense experiences can be perceived as pleasant. Where do we draw the line? In [SN3.12](#) it is also said that "The very same sights that are agreeable to some are disagreeable to others."

I don't see your logic here Bhante? Of course sensual pleasures are subjective. As a gay man my *kāmagūṇa* will be different to heterosexual men. Our music tastes are different etc etc. I don't see how that then means "secluded from sensual pleasures" means "secluded from sense experience entirely". A more natural reading, to me, would be that it means physically secluded from them. A mendicant goes to a forest, or a hut, or a cave with secluded from "unwholesome states" is mental seclusion, and so *Jhāna* requires both a bodily seclusion and a mental one.

(By the way, to those who don't believe that *kāma* can refer to the objects of the senses, this sutta clearly indicates that it does when it says "sights/sounds/etc are the best of the *kāmas* (sense objects)".)

I agree with you that *kāmehi* in the *Jhāna* passages is referring to sensual pleasures, i.e. pleasing sights etc.

With that personal aspect in mind, if in [AN9.42](#) we interpret the confinement as only "sensual pleasures", as you suggest, what is the escape from this confinement becomes very vague and personal. That does not fit the other "openings" that follow, which are very well defined, such as the disappearance of *pīti* in the third *jhāna*, and such. I'm saying that the "confinement" for the first *jhana* must also be something very defined. And in my opinion that is what Dan suggests, namely the five senses altogether. To leave behind the five senses is the way to truly escape from these "sensual stimulations".

The escape from them would be not desiring them, no? The abandoning of sensual desire (kāma) for sensual pleasures (kāma). Confinement to me means being distracted by sensual pleasures, with a mind that can't be still because its obsessing about sensual pleasures

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, the thought occurred to me: ‘My mind may often stray towards those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart but which have passed, ceased, and changed, or towards those that are present, or slightly towards those in the future.’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Being set on my own welfare, I should practise diligence, mindfulness, and guarding of the mind in regard to those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart, which have passed, ceased, and changed.’ - SN 35.117

Its personal, but I don't see what's vague about it?

If the confinement would just be “sensual pleasures”, it would also mean that just walking away from a sensual environment (like music or whatever) would be enough to enter this “opening amidst confinement”. But that can't be the proper requirement for such elevated states of mind.

No, you need to give up sensual desire and the hindrances too via maintaining the wholesome intentional thoughts (vitakka-vicāra) of loving-kindness, contentment etc etc

When they've been given up and eliminated, only thoughts about the teaching are left. That immersion is not peaceful or sublime or tranquil or unified, but is held in place by sasaṅkhāraniggayhavāritagato. - AN 3.101

sasaṅkhāraniggayhavāritagata

adj. held in place and restrained by intention; intentionally managed and controlled [sa + saṅkhāra + niggayha + vārita + gata]

In the first Jhāna one is continuously repelling the hindrances, which is why true composure of the mind comes with the 2nd Jhāna. Anyway, I'm digressing.

As a side note, regardless of how we interpret kāmaguṇa, texts like this show that the pleasure (sukha) of the jhanas is *not* a bodily feeling. Because that would be “touches known by the body —likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, etc.” It would be included in the kāmaguṇa.

It seems to me that the tranquillity of the body is what causes the physical ease (sukha). This isn't a kāmaguṇa, because its not based on contacting a sensual pleasure (the touch of a loved one, silk on the skin, and orgasm etc). I think a natural reading of the Indriya section of SN is that sukha in Jhāna is physical, not mental. Interestingly the commentaries also say that the sukha experienced is

physical, not mental. The sub-commentaries are even more clear on it, since they use the word “sarīra” which means the literal physical body.

In [SN1.30](#) it is also said (in verse) that: “The world has five kinds of sensual stimulation, and the mind is said to be the sixth.” So by analogy to the mind, the five kāmagaṇa refer to the five senses as a whole, not just the pleasant aspects of them.

*“The world has five kinds of sensual stimulation,
and the mind is said to be the sixth.
When you’ve discarded desire for these,
you’re released from all suffering.”*

People desire pleasing sights, sounds etc. People also desire mind based pleasure. I imagine the Jhāna’s are being referred to here. When you give up desire for sensual pleasures of the senses, and desire for the bliss of meditation, then you are awakened. People desire pleasing things. The problem is that they don’t see that what they desire leads to dukkha. The pleasing things they chase leads to dukkha.

And in [MN80](#) that: “The pleasure and happiness that arises from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called sensual pleasure. So there is the saying: ‘From the senses comes sensual pleasure.’”

Yes, but that doesn’t then mean seclusion from sensual pleasures means seclusion from sense experience. Pleasure and happiness can come from pleasing sights etc, and one is to be secluded from them. You still have a lot to do to get from that to “no sense experience”. So far it doesn’t follow.

And in [AN9.38](#): “These five kinds of sensual stimulation are called the world in the training of the noble one.” And one who has reached the first jhāna has provisionally reached the end of the world.

For beings in the kāma-loka sensual pleasures are their world. They live obsessed by them. Their vision is blurred by them. They operate their lives in slavery to them. The beings of the rūpa-loka also have sense experiences via the 5 senses, but they aren’t slaves to sensual pleasures. Or do you think Great Brahma and the others have only 4 aggregates instead of 5?

6 Likes

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 122 July 3, 2023, 7:15pm

Ceisiwr:

The escape from them would be not desiring them, no? The abandoning of sensual desire (kāma) for sensual pleasures (kāma). Confinement to me means being distracted by sensual pleasures, with a mind that can't be still because its obsessing about sensual pleasures

You can't have sensual desire or be distracted by sensuality if you don't have access to the five senses. So isn't what Ven. Sunyo is arguing just a stronger version of what you're arguing?

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 123 July 3, 2023, 7:29pm

Erik_ODonnell:

You can't have sensual desire or be distracted by sensuality if you don't have access to the five senses. So isn't what Ven. Sunyo is arguing just a stronger version of what you're arguing?

If I go blind tomorrow I can still be distracted by desire for pleasurable forms. Bhante is presenting a stronger argument, namely that secluded from sensual pleasures means totally shut off from any sense experience (of the 5 senses). For me secluded from sensual pleasures means just that. Secluded from pleasing sights, sounds, smells etc.

2 Likes

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 124 July 3, 2023, 7:40pm

Ceisiwr:

For me secluded from sensual pleasures means just that. Secluded from pleasing sights, sounds, smells etc.

Yes but you would achieve that if you shut off the five senses as well. If you went blind (though I hope you remain in good health of course!) you probably would be less distracted by sights, it'd be easier to focus on the other senses?

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 125 July 3, 2023, 7:45pm

Thank you for your interesting counter-arguments. But after reading a number of your posts, I can't figure out what your position is on rupa jhāna. Do you see them as total absorption (without the 5 senses)? Or as retaining the 5 senses? Or are you skeptical?

[Ceisiwr](#) 126 July 3, 2023, 8:05pm

Erik_ODonnell:

Yes but you would achieve that if you shut off the five senses as well.

Of course. The formless for example. The debate here is if “secluded from sensual pleasures” means “shut off from the senses” or “away from pleasing sense objects”. I quite like one of the Theravadin interpretations (there are different ones in the school on this) that it means bodily seclusion, whilst “unwholesome states” is the mental seclusion. You are physically away from sensual pleasures and mentally away from sensual desire, so the mind is (relatively) still.

That doesn't seem to be the message of the Indriyabhāvanā sutta (MN 152) or - [SN 35.117](#):

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, the thought occurred to me: ‘My mind may often stray towards those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart but which have passed, ceased, and changed, or towards those that are present, or slightly towards those in the future.’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Being set on my own welfare, I should practise diligence, mindfulness, and guarding of the mind in regard to those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart, which have passed, ceased, and changed.’

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 127 July 3, 2023, 8:19pm

Ceisiwr:

It states that the kāmagūṇa are sights etc which are manāpā (pleasant, likeable, attractive, agreeable). I don't see how you get from “sensual pleasures” to “sense experience”.

Hiya,

Thanks for a reasonable exchange. This is much more interesting to me than discussing with people who ignore dictionaries or entire meanings of a word.

I was talking about the gloss “i.e. the five objects of sensual pleasure viz. [or “that is to say”] rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, poṭṭhabba”. To me that reads as if the writers intended it to refer to all sense objects, regardless of whether they are pleasant.

But let’s agree to disagree on that, since I can understand how you read it differently, and it’s boring to argue over dictionaries!

Then still I’d say that if pleasant sights, sounds, etc. are abandoned, it is only natural that unpleasant sights, sounds, etc. are *also* abandoned. This is also what AN5.176 says: that in the first jhāna there are no pleasure *and* pain connected with the sense objects (*kāmas*). So, to come back to the original question of this topic, this also indicates that the first jhāna is already beyond physical pleasure and pain, that physical pain doesn’t end only at the fourth jhāna. The sutta also clearly separates this type of pleasure and pain from the pleasure and pain that come from the unskillful (i.e. the hindrances), showing that *kāmas* in context of the jhānas is not sensual desire (or “sensuality”), which is already included in the hindrances—as you agree (but others don’t).

And if your body is in pain, you can’t escape it by walking into a forest. So it has to mean something more deep than that, and to me it makes most sense if this means not being able to feel the body at all. That’s how you escape from bodily pain.

A more natural reading, to me, would be that it means physically secluded from them. A mendicant goes to a forest, or a hut, or a cave with secluded from “unwholesome states” is mental seclusion, and so Jhāna requires both a bodily seclusion and a mental one.

To me that’s not a natural reading, for reasons I’ve given, but also because it is pragmatically rather meaningless. Let’s take the enlightened, who have no hindrances all the time, so “unwholesome states” are always abandoned by them. In your interpretation, since the only other thing they have to fulfill is “bodily seclusion”, walking into the forest or hut makes the enlightened beings enter jhāna. That makes no sense to me. And that’s also what’s makes this interpretation vague, aside from pleasure being a personal preference, and it not taking into account that you can’t walk away from physical pain.

In the suttas we also consistently see the Buddha sitting down (or lying down in DN16) before he enters jhana, and he did so only *after* he already entered the forest a while before. Also, you can enter jhāna *without* going into a forest or being in isolation. In DN16 the Buddha attained it in a village while people were standing around him talking. Your interpretation of *vivicceva kāmehi* to move to a hut or forest doesn’t seem to align with these things.

The escape from them would be not desiring them, no? The abandoning of sensual desire (kāma) for sensual pleasures (kāma). Confinement to me means being distracted by sensual pleasures, with a mind that can't be still because its obsessing about sensual pleasures

No, that's not the escape in this sutta (AN9.42), because the confinements for the higher states are all certain perceptions or experiences, not a desire for those things or an obsession over them. For example, in the "dimension of infinite space", "Whatever perception of the dimension of infinite space has not ceased is the confinement there." The perception *itself* is the confinement, not the desire for it. By extent, the confinement before the first jhāna is also a certain perception, namely the perception of the five senses. This fits when for example AN9.34 says that "perceptions of sense objects" are abandoned. Or in Ven. Sujato's translation:

While a mendicant is in such a meditation, should perceptions accompanied by sensual pleasures beset them due to loss of focus, that's an affliction for them.

This also shows that withdrawing from sensual pleasures is not just walking into a forest or hut, as you argue. Otherwise these things wouldn't come back "to beset" you while you're still meditating! But they do come back. And they are said to do so, in Ven Sujato's translation at least, "due to loss of focus". This means that when you lose focus on the mind, then the five senses come back into awareness. (I'm not sure if I agree with this translation, although it doesn't really matter for my point.)

Notice also that the sensual pleasures are called an affliction, which also shows that the painful side is also included. Kāma isn't just the pleasant side of things, it includes the painful, which is even more afflictive than the pleasant side.

No, you need to give up sensual desire and the hindrances too via maintaining the wholesome intentional thoughts (vitakka-vicāra) of loving-kindness, contentment etc etc
When they've been given up and eliminated, only thoughts about the teaching are left. That immersion is not peaceful or sublime or tranquil or unified, but is held in place by
saṅkhāraṇiggayhavāritagato. - AN 3.101

As I read this, those thoughts connected to the dhamma are still happening before the jhāna. The first jhāna happens when the sutta later says: "But there comes a time when that mind is stilled internally; it settles, unifies, and becomes immersed in samādhi. That immersion is peaceful and sublime and tranquil and unified, not held in place by forceful suppression." The first jhana is peaceful and sublime. Anyway, as you say, this is digressing. Now we're discussing vitakka and vicāra. Let's not do that now.

This isn't a kāmagaṇa, because its not based on contacting a sensual pleasure

But the kāmagaṇa are “defined” not by what causes the feeling but just as “(pleasant) touches perceived by the body”, aka bodily feelings. Anything perceived through the body counts as a “touch” (kāya-viññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā). Whether this comes from an orgasm or some meditation experience is irrelevant. It remains a pleasant “touch”, so according to AN9.42 it has no place in the jhānas, and that is regardless of how we interpret kāmagaṇa.

Interestingly the commentaries also say that the sukha experienced is physical, not mental.

Not that it matters for what the suttas say, but where do the commentaries do so (not the sub-commentaries, some of which are written in the last handful of centuries)? The Visuddhimagga talks of sukha as being experienced (1) by “the *mental* body” and (2) by the “material body” only *after emerging* from the jhānas, so not in the jhāna itself. I’m not too fond of this commentarial “mental body” idea, as it misses the idiomatic use of kāya of “person”, but here the Visuddhimagga clearly doesn’t mean the sukha in the jhanas to be physical. The Abhidhamma also defines sukha in the jhānas as mental, and afaik it’s not often that the commentaries depart blatantly from the Abhidhamma, so if you can give a reference, that’d be helpful. Here’s what I know of:

Now, as to the clause *he feels bliss with his body*: here, although in one actually possessed of the third jhāna there is no concern about feeling bliss, nevertheless he would feel the bliss associated with his **mental** body, and *after emerging from the jhāna* he would also feel bliss since his material body would have been affected by the exceedingly superior matter originated by that bliss associated with the mental body. It is in order to point to this meaning that the words “he feels bliss with his body” are said. (Vism PTS 163)

Therein what is pleasure? That which is mental ease, mental pleasure, easeful pleasant experience born of mental contact, easeful pleasant feeling born of mental contact. This is called pleasure. This pleasure is accompanied by, co-nascent with, conjoined with, associated with this zest (pīti). Therefore this is called “zest and pleasure” (pītisukha). (Vb12)

Yes, but that doesn’t then mean seclusion from sensual pleasures means seclusion from sense experience.

What I was trying to say is that MN80 (in this translation anyway) appears to equate kāmagaṇa to “the senses”, not to the pleasure that comes from them. (Haven’t had time to look at the Pāli yet.)

Or do you think Great Brahma and the others have only 4 aggregates instead of 5?

I never met one of them, but I'd say they spend most of the time in jhānas, and that they are in the rūpa "loka" at that time. The lower heavens where the lower gods spend most time using the 5 senses are still part of the kāma loka. The Brahmas can still come back to lower realms, like when Brahma invited the Buddha to teach. That's when they have five senses, but not while they are in jhānas. Them spending most of the time in jhāna is what separates them from the lower kāma-loka gods, is what I think. (I also wonder how much of this Brahmas coming down to the human realm is to be taken literally, but anyway.)

They still have 5 aggregates, though, even in the jhānas, because rūpa extends beyond what we call material or "sensual". That's why non-returners, who are no longer attached to the five senses, are still said to have the fetter of desire for rūpa. This refers to desire for the jhānas, I think you'll agree. But since they no more sense desire, it has to refer to some desire for a mental thing.

In DN31 there is a distinction between three types of rūpa, on which Sujato notes:

"Visible and resistant [form]" refers to material phenomena perceivable by the eye. "Invisible and resistant" is a shorthand for material phenomena that are not perceivable by the eye, but which nonetheless impinge on other senses, such as sounds or smells. *"Invisible and non-resistant" includes form perceived solely in the mind.*

The latter rūpa is the rūpa of the jhānas, and this is the rūpa experienced by the Brahmas when they are in their natural state of jhāna.

In some suttas rūpa includes besides the four elements also a fifth element, that of space, and this is what is present in the jhānas. It's a mental perception of space, though, not a physical one (although you can't feel space with the body anyway). This "space" sort of falls apart in the first arūpa (I'm presuming and going by what I've been told, so I may change my mind later), hence the first arūpa is "the dimension of boundless space". Space, having no more boundaries, has become kind of ill-defined here, hence now it's called "formless".

After that state, the mental awareness also starts to cease in the formless attainments, ending eventually in the cessation of perception. So it's a natural progression: entering the jhānas (the rūpa attainments) the five sense world (kāma) has ceased. In the formless the object of the mind (the rūpa) starts cease. In the final attainment the mental awareness itself ceases as well.

Sorry, I'm drifting from the topic quite a bit here. But this is how I read the suttas, and it is what I think makes most sense considering both the texts and pragmatically.

Ceisiwr:

That doesn't seem to be the message of the Indriyabhāvanā sutta ([MN 152](#)) or - [SN 35.117](#):

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, the thought occurred to me: ‘My mind may often stray towards those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart but which have passed, ceased, and changed, or towards those that are present, or slightly towards those in the future.’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Being set on my own welfare, I should practise diligence, mindfulness, and guarding of the mind in regard to those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart, which have passed, ceased, and changed.’

But is this about jhāna or about more general sense restraint? Since it talks about mindfulness and guarding the mind, it's not yet samādhi in the sense of the jhānas.

4 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 128 July 3, 2023, 8:31pm

DeadBuddha:

Thank you for your interesting counter-arguments. But after reading a number of your posts, I can't figure out what your position is on rupa jhāna. Do you see them as total absorption (without the 5 senses)? Or as retaining the 5 senses? Or are you skeptical?

I think that originally the 1st Jhāna meant something like this

Vivicca - Secluded from, away from, not having anything to do with

Kāmehi - Sensual pleasures

Akusalehi dhammehi - Hindrances (such as sensual desire, ill-will etc)

Pīti - Rapture, an emotion which arises due to seeing the overcoming of the hindrances and is the basis for mental ease (somanassa)

Sukha - Physical ease due to bodily and mental tranquillity (and rapture)

Vitakka-vicāra - Synonymous with saṅkappa (intentional thoughts). Thoughts of loving-kindness, contentment, sympathetic joy etc which continually repel the hindrances (sasaṅkhāraniggayhavāritagata)

As I mentioned earlier, even for orthodox Theravāda there is physical ease when Jhāna is obtained, its just tradition considers it proper when absorption into a nimitta occurs. Here is my not so good translation of the commentary to DN 2

226. *So vivicceva kāmehi...pe... paṭhamam jhānam upasampajja viharatītiādi pana upacārasamādhinā samāhite citta uparivisesadassanattam appanāsamādhinā samāhite citta tassa samādhino pabhedadassanattam vuttanti veditabbaṃ. Imaeva kāyanti imam karajakāyaṃ. Abhisandeti temeti sneheti, sabbattha pavattapītisukhaṃ karoti. Parisandeti samantato sandeti. Paripūreti vāyunā bhastam viya pūreti. Parippharatīti samantato phusati. Sabbāvato kāyassāti assa bhikkhuno sabbakoṭṭhāsavato kāyassa kiñci upādinna kasantapavattiṭṭhāne chavimaṃsalohitānugataṃ aṇumattampi ṭhānam paṭhamajjhānasukhena aphuṭam nāma na hoti.*

“By means of seclusion from sensual pleasures...1st jhāna is arrived at and dwelt in” and so the citta concentrated in access concentration attains distinction concentrated in absorption concentration. That concentrated citta should be classed as and understood as being for the sake of seeing. “This exact same body” This physical body. “Fills up” Makes the naturally occurring rapture and pleasure drench and moisten everywhere. “Completely infuses” Experiences all around. “Whole body” This bhikkhu’s body, complete in all its parts, in the place where the continuity that is grasped occurs accompanied by skin, flesh and blood there is not even the tiniest part that is not pervaded with the happiness of the first jhāna.”

As I said, the sub-commentary makes it clear that the sukha here is of the physical body. What is interesting is that this commentary is saying that an experience of the body still occurs whilst in Jhāna. I happen to think there is likely differing views in the commentaries, with the Visuddhimagga trying to harmonise them all. In ancient times it looks like the majority of the Ābhidhammikas thought that the senses can’t operate whilst in Jhāna, possibly because momentariness makes it impossible. The Sautrāntika and many Mahāyānists taught the opposite. Even today in Mahāyāna, whilst they don’t teach Jhāna much, when they do they say that the senses are still experienced. This actually became the basis for Zen meditation much later. For example, what I said above regarding vitakka-vicāra is essentially the same as what is taught about them in the Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra, a very old Yogācārin work.

I should say that none of this precludes nimittas. They are too widely attested across all of these different traditions. In my mind, and in agreement with the Visuddhimagga, they are merely the mind’s attempt at making sense of the refined consciousness that is occurring during the attainment. The question is if we should absorb into them or not? I leave that open to you. Since the practice to attain these states is always the same, thereabouts, simply put in the work and obtain jhāna. Then you can decide if one is to absorb into a nimitta or not.

4 Likes

[Erik ODonnell](#) 129 July 3, 2023, 8:46pm

Ceisiwr:

Of course. The formless for example. The debate here is if “secluded from sensual pleasures” means “shut off from the senses” or “away from pleasing sense objects”.

I just thought it was worth pointing out that the first includes the other 🧑

In any case, I’m enjoying reading the ongoing discussion here and I don’t have anything more to add right now 😊

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 130 July 3, 2023, 9:16pm

Sunyo:

Thanks for a reasonable exchange. This is much more interesting to me than discussing with people who ignore dictionaries or entire meanings of a word.

Thank you Bhante for the enjoyable exchange too. It’s nice to be able to share our (somewhat) conflicting exegeses in a reasonable manner (both here and on the other thread). Also nice to converse with someone who doesn’t just make stuff up or, as you say, ignores dictionaries. I will reply to your post soon, possibly in a day or two or at the weekend. Sadly, the lay life gets in the way of these things.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 131 July 3, 2023, 10:11pm

Thank you so much for your opinion and advice.

I find your posts very helpful to me, and must be very helpful to others as well.

About nimitta (uggaha/patibhaga nimitta), what I find strange is that the “teachers explaining that one should absorb oneself in nimitta” insist a lot on nimitta in their teachings, and explain well how to form, maintain and then absorb oneself in nimitta.

But when I read the sutta talking about jhanas, I’ve never yet seen the Buddha insist so much on nimitta. When the Buddha talks about entering the jhanas, I just get the impression that you have to

get away from things that destabilize the mind (sensual pleasures, bad thoughts, etc.), contemplate perceptions (MN 125), and suppress factors.

This reminds me of the bhavanga-consciousness of the Pa-Auk system.

Pa-Auk teaches that in order to pass from the first jhâna to the second jhâna, one must :

- 1/ reach the first jhâna ;
- 2/ then exit the first jhâna ;
- 3/ then direct attention to bhavaïga consciousness at heart level;
- 4/ then examine the factors of the first jhâna (at the level of bhavaïga consciousness in the heart);
- 5/ then, understand the disadvantages of the coarse factors of the first jhâna, and understand the advantages of the factors of the second jhâna;
- 6/ while determined to eliminate the coarse factors of the first jhana, concentrate on patibhaga nimitta ;
- 7/ the second jhana appears.

These explanations are fascinating, rigorous and beautifully detailed. But when I read the suttas, I don't get the impression that the Buddha is talking about this (but this impression may be wrong). I have the impression that some people artificially construct theories and practices on top of the Buddha's teachings.

My interpretation of the suttas tends to be down-to-earth and not artificial. When I read suttas, I take the explicit meaning directly. That, for me, is a natural interpretation of the suttas. In other words, I don't try to force the Buddha's teaching into a philosophically systematic bottle that conforms to my idea of logic and ideological coherence.

5 Likes

[kumara](#) 132 July 4, 2023, 1:04am

Ceisiwr:

If I go blind tomorrow I can still be distracted by desire for pleasurable forms.

That's a very good point.

It also reminds me of [Indriya-bhavana Sutta: The Development of the Faculties](#)

1 Like

[kumara](#) 133 July 4, 2023, 1:09am

DeadBuddha:

About nimitta (uggaha/patibhaga nimitta), what I find strange is that the “teachers explaining that one should absorb oneself in nimitta” insist a lot on nimitta in their teachings, and explain well how to form, maintain and then absorb oneself in nimitta.

You find it strange because you’ve read the Suttas and find no connection between them.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 134 July 4, 2023, 2:05am

DeadBuddha:

About nimitta (uggaha/patibhaga nimitta), what I find strange is that the “teachers explaining that one should absorb oneself in nimitta” insist a lot on nimitta in their teachings, and explain well how to form, maintain and then absorb oneself in nimitta.

MN128, one of the more detailed suttas about meditation, is all about developing the nimittas. The Buddha’s explanation starts:

Before my awakening—when I was still unawakened but intent on awakening—I too perceived both light and vision of forms. But before long my light and vision of forms vanished.

Then it speaks about all sorts of hindrances which perfectly describe what happens when the nimittas arise, such as excitement (when they first come up), fear (when the body is let go off), or perceptions of diversity (when you focus too much on the shapes of the lights or they aren’t stable). When the hindrances arose for the Buddha, “my immersion fell away.” At the end it concludes:

‘I’ve given up my mental corruptions. Now let me develop immersion in three ways.’ I developed immersion while placing the mind and keeping it connected; without placing the mind, but just keeping it connected; without placing the mind or keeping it connected; with rapture; without rapture; with pleasure; with equanimity.

When Bodhi translates “you should discover the cause for that” (for the lights to disappear), he notes “*Nimittam paṭivijjhitabbaṃ*. Lit. “You should penetrate that sign [nimitta].” Although *nimitta* can mean ‘cause’, perhaps a more literal translation is warranted, because two sentences later the text just uses the more normal *hetu* and *paccaya*, not *nimitta*: “What is the cause (*hetu*) and condition (*paccaya*) why the light and the vision of forms have disappeared?” (Late edit: Having let it sink in a bit, I think it’s likely Bodhi’s translation is correct, that *nimitta* means ‘cause’ here.) Either way, whether *nimitta* here means the sign as later tradition used the term, or more figuratively “cause”, the practice described in this sutta imo quite clearly is about the lights and forms that come up in meditation, and how to stabilize them.

I’m not familiar with Pa Auk’s system, though, which you describe.

5 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 135 July 4, 2023, 4:59am

kumara:

It’s hard to understand how the meaning of a word should be different because of the number.

Sunyo:

But it is not “because of” the number that the meaning changes. It is because of the *context*. The number is just an extra indication we can use in this particular case of *kāma*.

I’d like to chime in with a couple of points that I hope haven’t been made by anyone! I have only read bits and pieces of this thread.

An important indication of the meaning of *kāma* is that other Pali words for desire, such as *taṇhā*, *rāga*, *lobha*, and *chanda*, are almost always found in the singular. With *kāma* it’s the other way around: the plural form is the predominant one. *Kāma* in the singular corresponds to the other words for desire, whereas *kāma* in the plural must refer to something else, that is, the five senses.

Moreover, there are a number of compounds that make much better sense if we understand *kāma* in the plural as the five senses. Here are some:

- *Kāmacchanda*: desire regarding the five senses (not desire for sensual desire)
- *Kāmarāga*: lust in regard to the five senses (not lust for desire)
- *Kāmupapatti*: rebirth in realm of the five senses (not rebirth in the realm of sensual desire)
- *Kāmupādāna*: grasping in relation to the five senses (not grasping of sensual desire)

kumara:

Apart from those in the Aj Brahm school of thought and those who go by the Visuddhimagga's idea of jhana, I don't know of anyone who accepts that plural definition kama in Margaret Cone's dictionary.

What about the entire Pali commentarial tradition?

Ceisiwr:

It's freedom from sensual pleasures, not the 5 senses.

The five senses are interesting only in so far as they provide pleasure. Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together.

6 Likes

[kumara](#) 136 July 4, 2023, 6:49am

Brahmali:

there are a number of compounds that make much better sense if we understand *kāma* in the plural as the five senses. Here are some:

- *Kāmacchanda*: desire regarding the five senses (not desire for sensual desire)
- *Kāmarāga*: lust in regard to the five senses (not lust for desire)
- *Kāmupapatti*: rebirth in realm of the five senses (not rebirth in the realm of sensual desire)
- *Kāmupādāna*: grasping in relation to the five senses (not grasping of sensual desire)

Bhante, my translations for the above:

- *Kāmacchanda*: sensual desire
- *Kāmarāga*: sensual passion
- *Kāmupapatti*: sensual birth
- *Kāmupādāna*: sensual clinging

Another:

kāmasukha: sensual happiness

kumara:

Apart from those in the Aj Brahm school of thought and those who go by the Visuddhimagga's idea of jhana, I don't know of anyone who accepts that plural definition kama in Margaret Cone's dictionary.

What about the entire Pali commentarial tradition?

Doesn't that come under those who go by the Visuddhimagga's idea of jhana?

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 137 July 4, 2023, 8:02am

Hi Venerable, nice to see you here!

kumara:

Bhante, my translations for the above:

- *Kāmacchanda*: sensual desire
- *Kāmarāga*: sensual passion
- *Kāmupapatti*: sensual birth
- *Kāmupādāna*: sensual clinging

Another:

kāmasukha: sensual happiness

These are reasonable translations, but they don't help us much with the deciding the exact meaning of *kāma*. We know from [AN6.63](#) that *kāma* can refer to the personal feeling of desire for things in the sensory realm:

Greedy intention is a person's sensual pleasure (*kāmo*, singular)

We also know that *kāma* and *kāmaguṇa* are used extensively to refer to the objects of the senses:

There are these five kinds of sensual stimulation (*kāmaguṇā* = *kāmā*, both plural) — Sights known by the eye ... Sounds known by the ear ... Smells known by the nose ... Tastes known by

the tongue ... Touches known by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing.

You can see here how the rendering “sensual pleasure(s)” obscures the distinction between the different meanings of singular and the plural. If fact, it seems this is precisely why so many translators choose this rendering. It means they can render *kāma* with a single word. Personally I am not sure if this is such a good idea, precisely because it obscures what is going on. When a single word has two significantly different meanings, I think it is better to vary the translation dependent on the context.

So when it comes to the compounds *kāmacchanda*, *kāmarāga*, *kāmupapatti*, and *kāmupādāna*, it is necessary, I think, to translate with greater precision as to the two known meanings of *kāma*, and then see which makes the better sense. Hence my renderings above.

kumara:

Doesn't that come under those who go by the Visuddhimagga's idea of jhana?

The commentarial literature is huge, spanning millennia and involving a large number of different authors. So far as I know there are no alternative interpretations of *jhāna*. The reinterpretation suggested here seems to be a modern phenomenon started by the likes of Rod Bucknell. But see Ven. Analayo's critique of Rod Bucknell in *Journal of Buddhist Studies* Vol. XIX, 2022.

5 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 138 July 4, 2023, 8:13am

Hi Venerables both,

I don't think *kāma* is an adjective in these compounds, though, if anywhere. Sometimes such compounds seems to be translated as if *kāma* was an adjective (“sensual”), as in “sensual desire” or “sensual pleasure”, but those are just shorthand translations, employed because expressions like “desire for sense objects” and “pleasure coming from sense objects” are bulky and unsightly. But the latter is what those compounds literally mean. That this is the case is indicated by other places where the “parts” of the compounds are separated and *kāma* is clearly a noun, like in *kāmesu rajjati* (“he desires sense objects”, Snp1.9) or *kāmesu tibbasārāgā* (“with strong desire for sense objects”, MN4). (Just two examples I quickly found for *kāmarāga*.)

If there is any place where *kāma* is clearly an adjective I stand corrected. But either way, in *vivicceva kāmehi* the word *kāmehi* clearly isn't an adjective, otherwise it means “fully separated from sensual”,

which is meaningless. So here it is surely a noun.

Very commonly mentioned in the suttas is also “heavenly *kāmas*” (*dibbā kāmā*) which makes little sense as “heavenly sense desires” (or “heavenly sensuals” or “heavenly sensualities”). What it means is heavenly sights, heavenly sounds, etc. Somewhere in DN it is also mentioned that a father will provide his son with *kāmehi*, i.e. with sense objects, not sense desires or “the sensuals/sensualities”. There’s more quotes like this where the objective meaning of *kāma* is very clear. This meaning of *kāma* as the sensual objects really shouldn’t be under discussion.

But does it apply to the first *jhāna* formula? I said before that the plural doesn’t *necessarily* mean that *kāmehi* refers to these objects, although it is a strong indication. But many texts directly oppose the *kāma*(*guṇa*)s to the first *jhāna*, which indicates that this objective meaning of *kāma* is what is implied in *vivicceva kāmehi*.

Of course, we can still argue exactly what that means. Is it being without any sense experiences, is it being withdrawn in a hut, or is it something else? Regardless, as I mentioned to Ceisiwr, I think it leaves no room for the *pīti* and *sukha* of the *jhanas* to be pleasant bodily feelings, because these would be included in the *kāma*(*guṇa*)s regardless of how we interpret it. As I quoted before: “The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called sensual pleasure. [But] there is another pleasure that is finer than that.”

4 Likes

[kumara](#) 139 July 4, 2023, 8:38am

Brahmali:

We know from [AN6.63](#) that *kāma* can refer to the personal feeling of desire for things in the sensory realm:

Greedy intention is a person’s sensual pleasure (*kāmo*, singular)

I’d translate the noun form literally as “sensuality”.

Brahmali:

There are these five kinds of sensual stimulation (*kāmaguṇā* = *kāmā*, both plural)

Isn’t that forcing an equation here? Clearly, there’s no *kāmā* in here.

Brahmali:

The commentarial literature is huge, spanning millennia and involving a large number of different authors.

The same commentarial literature also admits that “jhana” (as they understand it) is not necessary for liberation from suffering.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 140 July 4, 2023, 10:03am

It's true that MN 128 is interesting. The Buddha talks about developing light and forms to access jhanas.

But personally, I don't recall any other sutta stating that “the development of visions of light and forms enables one to attain jhana”. So far, in all the other suttas I've read about jhana, the Buddha doesn't talk about the development of light and form (when the suttas mention light, they're referring to higher knowledge - for example, the divine eye - aren't they?). So I would find it a little strange to consider that MN 128 proves the absolute necessity of the development of light and forms for jhana. It seems strange to me.

And as this [article](#) explains (which Venerable Kumara shared in his book), even commentaries like the Visuddhimagga assert that there are meditations allowing access to jhana without relying on light as the object of attention (from memory I think there's skeleton meditation, worm-infested body meditation, dismemberment meditation, etc.).

However, I admit that this sutta is rather disturbing.

Also, if you want to know more about the Pa-Auk system, I recommend [reading](#) “Knowing and Seeing” and “The Only Way for the Realization of Nibbāna” by Pa Auk Sayadaw. They describe in detail the stages of meditation leading to Nibbana, based on the commentaries (and particularly the Visuddhimagga; Pa Auk Sayadaw is a huge fan of the Visuddhimagga and has great respect for it). The explanations are very detailed, fine-tuned and precise.

1 Like

[thomaslaw](#) 141 July 4, 2023, 11:07am

Some contents of the four jhanas are found in the SN/SA *Vedana Samyutta*, e.g. SN 36.11, 15-18 (= SA 474), SN 36.19-20 (= SA 485); SN 36.29 (= SA 483).

But the four jhanas are certainly not the core teachings of the Buddha for the cessation of dukkha.

The core teachings of the Buddha for the cessation of dukkha are essentially about *Right View*, according to SN/SA suttas.

[Who is the best teacher on Samatha and Vipassana meditation?](#)

I think the best teacher on Samatha and Vipassana is the core teachings of SN/SA suttas themselves.

E.g.: Vipassana in SN/SA suttas is the practice of 'right view' [How to get Right View? - #13 by thomaslaw](#) Samatha in SN/SA suttas is the practice of 'mindfulness'. See: [📄 Pages 215-8 from The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism Choong Mun-keat 2000.pdf](#) (285.9 KB) [📄 Pages 225-7 from The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism Choong Mun-keat 2000.pdf](#) (210.4 KB)

So, did the Buddha teach the four jhanas for his core dhamma, although it is part of the noble eightfold path?

If the Buddha did not teach the four jhanas for his core dhamma, then, any interpretations of the four jhanas seem meaningless for the cessation of dukkha!

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 142 July 4, 2023, 12:08pm

kumara:

I'd translate the noun form literally as "sensuality".

But again, the ambiguity in the term sensuality avoids taking a clear position. If *kāma* means sensual desire, then the translation need to work with this rendering.

kumara:

Isn't that forcing an equation here? Clearly, there's no *kāmā* in here.

This is how *kāma* is understood in our best dictionaries. Some of these dictionaries, especially the CPD, are meticulously researched. We should have really good reasons for going against them. I

cannot see any such reasons. Again, the fact that all words for “desire” normally occur in the singular means that *kāma* in the plural must refer to something else.

kumara:

The same commentarial literature also admits that “jhana” (as they understand it) is not necessary for liberation from suffering.

Sometimes this does seem to be the case, but generally the commentaries are very positive about the contribution of *jhāna* on the path. In any case, this is a different matter. Even if the commentaries at times misrepresent the importance of *jhāna*, this does not mean that they also misunderstand the meaning *kāma*. I believe we should assume that the accumulated wisdom of the commentaries is right unless we have good evidence to the contrary.

1 Like

[NgXinZhao](#) 143 July 4, 2023, 3:01pm

Just following the title, I thought the discussion should be about the following suttas, not sure if my following question is brought up yet, I didn't read everything, but I am curious how to reconcile deep Jhānas with the following 2 suttas?

sn48.36 defines the 5 faculties:

And what is the faculty of pleasure? Physical enjoyment, physical pleasure, the enjoyable, pleasant feeling that's born from physical contact. This is called the faculty of pleasure.

And what is the faculty of pain? Physical pain, physical unpleasantness, the painful, unpleasant feeling that's born from physical contact. This is called the faculty of pain.

And what is the faculty of happiness? Mental enjoyment, mental pleasure, the enjoyable, pleasant feeling that's born from mind contact. This is called the faculty of happiness.

And what is the faculty of sadness? Mental pain, mental displeasure, the painful, unpleasant feeling that's born from mind contact. This is called the faculty of sadness.

sn48.40 has faculty of pleasure only cease at 3rd Jhāna. Indicating that 1st and 2nd Jhāna can still feel physical pleasant feelings.

an5.176 somewhat contradicts and agrees with this a bit. Pleasure and happiness connected with the skillful is in the 1st Jhāna, by which it's natural to interpret pleasure as bodily happiness and happiness and mental happiness.

Yet, faculty of sadness only completely cease in 2nd Jhāna according to SN48.40. One could harmonize this with AN5.176 by assuming that sensual pleasures, skillful and the unskillful doesn't cover all possibilities. There can be sadness connected with something else which doesn't cease in first Jhāna yet. Or else, there's a contradiction between these 3 suttas, whereby at least one must be wrong.

Great to see many prominent monks here, hopefully, there can be some answers to my query.

2 Likes

[Sasha_A](#) 144 July 4, 2023, 6:07pm

NgXinZhao:

Indicating that 1st and 2nd Jhāna can still feel physical pleasant feelings.

Well, if we were to cleanse the translation of SN48.36 of all injections and implications, and leave it as bare as possible, then I think (it's a dictionary translation, so it's certainly very rough) it should look something like this:

The faculties of sukha, dukkha, somanassa, domanassa, upekkha.

And what, monks, is the faculty of sukha?

Whatever, monks, bodily sukha, a bodily agreeableness, an agreeableness of a feeling of the contact of the body, - this is called the faculty of sukha.

And what, monks, is the faculty of dukkha?

Whatever, monks, bodily dukkha, a bodily disagreeableness, a disagreeableness of a feeling of the contact of the body, - this is called the faculty of dukkha.

And what, monks, is the faculty of somanassa?

Whatever, monks, mental sukha, a mental agreeableness, an agreeableness of a feeling of the contact of the mind, - this is called the faculty of somanassa.

And what, monks, is the faculty of domanassa?

Whatever, monks, mental dukkha, a mental disagreeableness, a disagreeableness of a feeling of the contact of the mind, - this is called the faculty of domanassa.

And what, monks, is the faculty of upekkha?

Whatever, monks, neither agreeableness nor disagreeableness of bodily or mental feeling, - this is called the faculty of upekkha.

If this translation is to be accepted, then I think it is not difficult to see that in such a reading the meaning of the passage becomes significantly different: from considering the body and mind as organs, and the qualities as qualities of the perceptions of these organs, to considering simply the immediate experience of sensations, some of which are perceived as bodily and some of which are perceived as mental. In other words, when it is spoken of jhana, it is not the cessation of physical perceptions that is meant, but the cessation of the agreeableness or disagreeableness of bodily and mental experiences.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 145 July 5, 2023, 1:37am

Brahmali:

kumara:

I'd translate the noun form literally as "sensuality".

But again, the ambiguity in the term sensuality avoids taking a clear position. If *kāma* means sensual desire, then the translation need to work with this rendering.

That's not a problem in Pali. So, why should we make it a problem in English?

Ambiguity of words is common in languages. Context narrows their meaning. E.g, how do we translate *kāmesu micchācāra*?

Just as *kāma* has a range of meanings in Pali, so does "sensuality" in English. I'm sure you've seen that yourself.

The same applies for *sukha* and its most apt English translation "happiness".

1 Like

[kumara](#) 146 July 5, 2023, 1:40am

Brahmali:

kumara:

The same commentarial literature also admits that “jhana” (as they understand it) is not necessary for liberation from suffering.

Sometimes this does seem to be the case, but generally the commentaries are very positive about the contribution of *jhāna* on the path. In any case, this is a different matter. Even if the commentaries at times misrepresent the importance of *jhāna*, this does not mean that they also misunderstand the meaning *kāma*. I believe we should assume that the accumulated wisdom of the commentaries is right unless we have good evidence to the contrary.

Bhante, you’ve misunderstood my saying the above. I mean to imply that the orthodox Theravada commentarial version of *jhāna* is different from that of the Suttas.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 147 July 5, 2023, 1:43am

NgXinZhao:

how to reconcile deep *Jhānas* with the following 2 suttas?

Assuming by “deep *Jhānas*” you mean “absorption *jhānas*”, it’s not possible.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 148 July 5, 2023, 2:03am

Arrggh, discussions like this just make me want to meditate! 😊🧘 But I got feedback even in real life that it’s helpful to people who are confused about the topic, so I’ll stick around here a bit more. And exchanging thoughts on these subjects is also helpful for me, so thanks everybody.

DeadBuddha:

And as this [article](#) explains (which Venerable Kumara shared in his book), even commentaries like the Visuddhimagga assert that there are meditations allowing access to jhana without relying on light as the object of attention

Thanks for those links. 😊 I will need to look into the venerable Pa Auk's teachings a bit more one day, although I have to say it is exactly his strong reliance on the Visuddhimagga which has put me off till now. 🙄

As to the article on nimittas, I don't have any problems with it. I actually agree that in the jhānas there are no lights. In the first jhāna the object is pīti-sukha, not a light or other nimittas. The nimittas are a way *into* jhanas, but not the jhānas themselves. That is likely one reason that the light nimittas aren't mentioned super often in the suttas.

Another likely reason the suttas don't often mention them is that the mind can represent itself in many ways to meditators. Lights are a common way, but they're not a requisite. Nimittas can also be "sounds" or certain "bodily feelings" or metta or what have you. But these "sounds" aren't heard by the ear, nor are the "bodily feelings" felt by the body: they're all just representations (or reflections or "signs") of the mind. Many people find it hard to describe this territory of meditation. This diversity in hard-to-describe experiences can also explain why the suttas don't tend to pin themselves down to lights and forms alone. Notice also that the instructions in MN128 are given to three specific bhikkhus, not to the general populace like most other texts on meditation. The three experienced lights and forms, but that doesn't mean everybody always does.

A third reason is that advanced meditators may be able to skip the stage of nimittas altogether. I wouldn't be surprised if the Buddha for example was able to go straight into jhāna, skipping any kind of lights or other nimittas.

As to the article questioning whether *nimitta* in MN128 refers to the lights or idiomatically to the 'cause' of samādhi, I agree with Ven. Ānalyo in his comparative study of the sutta: "This sense of nimitta as a mental 'sign' or object used for the development of concentration would also fit the present context well, which describes meditative visions and the development of concentration. At a later point of its exposition, the Upakkilesa-sutta [MN128] in fact explicitly uses the term nimitta in order to refer to the vision of light and forms that Anuruddha and his companions had been unable to stabilize, a usage where nimitta clearly stands for a mental sign, for something that is perceived." That is to say, it certainly doesn't mean "cause" at that later instance, so Ven. Bodhi's translation "you should understand the cause for that" is perhaps not literal enough, and it should be "you should penetrate that sign [nimitta]", meaning basically what you said earlier, "absorb oneself in nimitta", or "enter that nimitta". (Edit some days later: I'm now more convinced Bodhi's translation is more likely to be correct.)

DeadBuddha:

I don't recall any other sutta stating that "the development of visions of light and forms enables one to attain jhana"

Although MN128 is indeed the most explicit text on the nimittas, I don't think it is alone in describing these experiences. I see references elsewhere too, though they don't use the word *nimitta*: both in the Ānāpānassati and Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas, but particularly in the kasinas and "the eight bases of transcendence/mastery".



First, in the Ānāpānassati Sutta (MN118) it says: "I'll breathe in experiencing the mind." This "experiencing the mind" refers in my experience to the same stage of meditation described in MN128. It's not called a light or form here, because what you are *actually* experiencing when you "see" (or "hear" or "feel") a nimitta is the mind itself. This instruction talks about the same thing as MN128, but more directly, bypassing the perception of light and going straight to what the light represents, which is the mind.

To continue, the subsequent instruction in ānāpānassati is "gladdening the mind", which is the stabilizing of the lights that MN128 talks about. Put simply, it's because of lacking gladness that the various hindrances take over. If the mind is truly glad, it won't become sleepy, restless, distracted, and so forth.

Then the next step of Ānāpānassati is "samadhi-ing" the mind, unifying the mind, i.e. moving towards jhānas. In the next step the mind is "liberated", which means the hindrances are completely abandoned and the mind enters the jhānas. (These two steps essentially go together.) The jhanas are also called temporary liberations of the mind (e.g. MN122), and this is what "liberating the mind" in Ānāpānassati refers to. It can't mean liberation in the ultimate sense of ending of craving, because there are still contemplations to be done afterwards.

So the Ānāpānassati Sutta fits MN128 very well, in my view.

In the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas I also see similar ideas to MN128 under the third factor of "mind". For example, when MN128 mentions "loss of focus on forms" and "perception of diversity" those are examples of "the scattered mind" of the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas.

Now, I may be opening another  of , but I also think the kasinas (which are not super common in the suttas but also not exactly rare), in later tradition taken to be physical disks, were **originally meant** to be mental perceptions we now call nimittas. For example, "the meditation on universal yellow" (AN10.25) would be a yellow light which takes up your whole awareness, the "universality" implying among other things that you don't perceive the body anymore. (*Kasina* literally means 'total', hence Bhante Sujato's translation "universal". Perhaps "pervasive" gives a better sense of the meaning.)

The kasinas are not explained in much detail in the suttas, but in MN77 they precede the jhānas, so it seems they lead up to them, as is commonly assumed. Then they fit the lights and forms of MN128 extremely well, with these kasinas and nimittas both leading to samādhi. The various color “kasinas” are then the light nimittas (*obhāsanimitta*) of MN128, and the elemental kasinas (including space) being the form nimittas (*rūpanimitta*).

Also very tellingly, MN128 concludes the development of these nimittas with: “I perceive limitless (*sañjānāmi appamāṇāni*) lights and see limitless forms” and the kasinas are likely said to be “perceived as limitless” (*sañjānāti appamāṇam*). Same words, same ideas. So the kasinas are what MN128 calls nimittas. A yellow kasina is a yellow nimitta, for example.

Another reference to nimittas seems to be the “eight bases for transcendence” (or “eight bases of mastery/overcoming”), for example at DN16, AN10.29. We again have mentions of “forms” and “perceptions”, and the word “limitless” reappears again here for the higher perceptions. The exact same colors as the “kasinas” are mentioned as well. So it’s quite clearly presenting the same idea as the kasinas, and therefore the same as MN128, which also talks about limitless perceptions of forms and lights (i.e. colors). Accordingly, Bhante Sujato notes on these “eight basis” at DN16: “The ‘visions’ (*rūpā*) seen externally are the lights or other meditation phenomena that *today are usually called nimitta*.” (I’m not exactly sure why the nimittas are said to be “seen *externally*”, though. The commentaries seems to say it’s because they are opposed to the “internal” form of the body. 🤔 So then it’s external in the sense of being an external āyatana, a sense object, though it’s a mental one.)

In short, the nimittas are in other places too, not just in MN128, just under different names.

I’m well aware that some of these references are somewhat opaque, and I also still have some questions about them (so what I did say is subject to revision 😊), but I think they make much more sense in light of the deeper jhanas which require nimittas, compared to the bodily jhanas where this sort of stuff is generally just seen as commentarial ideas that can be disregarded. But all these things are also all found in various parallels, so they clearly predate the commentaries by a long time, as is the case with MN128.

DeadBuddha:

However, I admit that this sutta is rather disturbing.

May I ask why you find MN128 “disturbing”? I hope I am not disturbing you even more! 🙏

2 Likes

NgXinZhao:

but I am curious how to reconcile deep Jhānas with the following 2 suttas?

Nice to see you here too, Venerable. Those are good questions. We discussed this briefly [before](#). Here are my thoughts.

SN48.40 is problematic for *both* interpretations of the jhānas, actually, because the “pleasure faculty” (*sukha-indriya*) is said to be abandoned already in the *third* jhāna, while *sukha* is normally said to be abandoned in the fourth. This is awkward no matter how we interpret the jhānas.

If we interpret the *sukha* of the third jhāna to be experienced “with the body”, then why does SN48.40 say the faculty of *sukha* (which SN48.36–39 define as bodily) has ceased in the third jhāna? If anything, this then actually **confirms** that the *sukha* of the third jhāna is *not* bodily, because it says there’s no more bodily *sukha* in the third jhāna. So the *sukha* of the third jhana must then be mental. 🤔

But then the *sukha* of the second jhāna apparently is bodily? How does that make sense? Does the meaning of *sukha* shift between the jhānas? In the 1st and 2nd it is bodily but in the 3rd it is not? That seems strange. 😬

In AN5.176 all pleasure (*sukha*) and pain connected to the *kāma* are abandoned in the first jhāna already, so this includes bodily pleasure. This apparently contradicts SN48.40 as well.

It’s likewise strange why the faculty of *domanassa* (“sadness”) is said to be abandoned in the second jhana in SN48.40. This also contradicts AN5.176 which implies all *domanassa* (of the skillful and unskillful and of the sensual) is already abandoned in the *first* jhāna.

Now, the answer may be authenticity, as you suggest when you say “at least one must be wrong”.

But if we assume the text is authentic, then I would reply that the bodily *sukha* is already abandoned in the first jhana, but in SN48.40 it’s linked to the third jhāna *exactly* to make the point that the *sukha* that still exists in the third jhāna is NOT bodily. In other words, bodily *sukha* was already gone at first jhana, but to emphasize that *sukha* in the third jhana is mental, it’s stated specifically before the third jhana that bodily *sukha* has ceased there.

Because *technically* speaking the text actually does not say that bodily *sukha* still exists in the earlier jhanas (although we may imply that). It just says that it has ceased in the third. That’s being a bit pedantic, but it does seem to me the best way to resolve the issue. And it certainly wouldn’t be the first time that the Buddha is being creative with how he phrased things.

Maybe somebody else has some more satisfying resolution. But for now, I think this text is actually most problematic for the bodily jhana view.

3 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 150 July 5, 2023, 5:07am

kumara:

That's not a problem in Pali. So, why should we make it a problem in English?

It is not really a problem. My point is just that when we try to discover the meaning of a concept, we need to translate as explicitly as possible so as to see how the rendering works. In other words, this concerns interpretation, not necessarily translation.

kumara:

Bhante, you've misunderstood my saying the above. I mean to imply that the orthodox Theravada commentarial version of *jhāna* is different from that of the Suttas.

The commentaries may occasionally underestimate the importance of *jhāna*, but this does not automatically mean they misunderstand its character.

Anyway, thanks for engaging! Hopefully we are both learning something. 😊

2 Likes

[Nickelii](#) 151 July 5, 2023, 6:51am

Sunyo:

In [AN5.176](#) all pleasure (*sukha*) and pain connected to the *kāma* are abandoned in the first *jhāna* already, so this includes bodily pleasure. This apparently contradicts [SN48.40](#) as well.

Sunyo. AN 5.176 does not sound related to *jhana*. It reads as a teaching for householders that does not go beyond rapture. Rapture in the suttas does not always refer to *jhana*, as in SN 12.23.

Sunyo:

[SN48.40](#) is problematic for *both* interpretations of the jhānas, actually, because the “pleasure faculty” (*sukha-indriya*) is said to be abandoned already in the *third* jhāna, while *sukha* is normally said to be abandoned in the fourth. This is awkward no matter how we interpret the jhānas.

Sunyo. The *sukha*-faculty in the framework of SN 48.40 must include *piti-sukha* rather than only *sukha*. Also, more importantly, the meaning of the word ‘*indriya*’ meaning ‘controlling’ may need to be examined with *yonisomanasikara*. It looks like run-of-the-mill Abhidhamma & Commentary style scholarship that makes synonyms out of various words is not an appropriate EBT approach to EBT scholarship.

Similarly, as for SN 48.40 in its entirety, not that we may likely agree, but:

- it is either using the words *samudaya* & *nirodha* in a corrupted manner, similar to in the Piltown Sutta MN 10 & Abhidhamma, where *samudaya*, *jati* & *upphajati* or *nirodha* & *vaya* look treated as synonyms; or
- it is using *samudaya* & *nirodha* in a proper manner (as in SN 22.5 & most places; as explained by the Elder Venerable Payutto) and is referring to something beyond the mere *upphajati* of the jhana factors because the terms *samudaya* (as in SN 22.5) & *nirodha* are generally used in relation to attachment & other unwholesome states.
- To add, SN 48.40, unique to the suttas, includes the words *sanimittam sanidānam sasaṅkhāram sappaccayam*. The words sound similar to the more common words *kinnidāno kimsamudayo kimjātiko kimpabhavo*, which look only used in relation to unwholesome states, unless I am mistaken. In SN 48.40, the use of the words *nimitta* & *saṅkhāra* looks particularly interesting and might refer to some type of mental formation or view giving a ‘controlling power’ (‘*indriya*’) to the respective feelings. The word ‘*nimitta*’ as ‘sign’ is often used as a controlling power over the mind.
- To conclude, SN 48.40 may be saying, in the 3rd jhana, the power of feelings to control/dictate (‘*indriya*’) the mind ceases (*nirodha*) when rapture (*piti*) ceases.
- I recall Ajahn Buddhadasa in his renowned book titled: *Anapanasati Unveiling The Secrets of Life For Serious Beginners* discussed the matter of *piti* vs *sukha*; how *sukha* is peaceful but *piti* impacts the mind less peacefully. The Elder Ajahn said:

*The important quality of piti for you to be aware of is that it is not peaceful. There is a kind of excitement or disturbance in the thing, called piti. Only when it becomes sukha is it tranquil. Piti has varying levels but all are characterized as stimulating, as causing the citta to shake. Sukha is the opposite. It calms and soothes the mind. This is how piti and sukha differ. The most important thing to study and observe is the **power** piti has over the mind. ...What **influence** does piti have on the mind and thoughts? Carefully observe how the mind is when piti has not arisen. Once piti arises, what is the citta like? What is the effect of a lot of piti? How is the mind when there is only a little piti? When piti is heavy, especially rapture, how much more does it stimulate the mind? Study the coarse kinds of piti,*

medium levels, and the finest types, to see how they differ. Then, see how their influence upon the mind differs. This is the crucial point of this step of practice.

[Bhikkhu Buddhadasa - Anapanasati Mindfulness with Breathing](#)

Thus, when it comes to the 4th jhana, the author of the sutta has chosen to use somanassa as the primary subject and ignored the sukha.

It looks very unlikely the author of SN 48.40 would make an error by saying sukha vedana is felt in the 3rd jhana but also say the faculty of sukha has ceased (nirodha) in the 3rd jhana if 'vedana' & 'indriya' were synonymous. It looks like regarding sukha vedana to be a synonym of sukha indriya and also regarding uppajjati & samudaya to also be synonyms is possibly an error.

If samudaya & uppajjati and nirodha & vaya are regarded to be synonymous, in an Abhidhamma, Commentary or MN 10 manner, SN 48.40 will look problematic. But if the more nuanced Elder Buddhadasa or Payutto approach is taken, the problematicness of SN 48.40 will cease (nirodha). 🙌🙌

1 Like

[Pondera](#) 152 July 5, 2023, 7:43am

Sunyo:

The nimittas are a way *into* jhanas, but not the jhānas themselves.

I've read MN128 and I've noticed the Buddha say that the reason for the disappearance of his vision of lights and forms is his loss of immersion due to the various corruptions.

If the nimittas were the way into jhana, the jhana would disappear with the loss of the nimitta and not the other way around. 🙄

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 153 July 5, 2023, 8:25am

Brahmali:

The commentaries may occasionally underestimate the importance of *jhāna*, but this does not

automatically mean they misunderstand its character.

I do think they understand the character of *jhāna* as they understand it. That is why they regard it as optional.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 154 July 5, 2023, 8:50am

Venerable [@Sunyo](#) , I thank you with all my heart for your work, I am extremely grateful.

Sunyo:

May I ask why you find [MN128](#) “disturbing”? I hope I am not disturbing you even more!

At the time, I was a little perturbed by the Buddha’s explicit insistence on the use of light and form to attain jhana, whereas this technique is not as clearly and explicitly described in other sutta: I found it a little hard to understand where this technique stood in relation to other techniques.

Anyway, you’re not confusing me at all, on the contrary. It’s really wonderful for us that you’ve come to answer our questions, you’re helping a lot of people, and as I’ve already said, this topic will certainly be read a lot in the future, so that even more people will be helped. That goes for all the Venerables - [@kumara](#) , [@sabbamitta](#) , [@Brahmali](#) , [@NgXinZhao](#) , etc. - who post here: you’re all real lights for beings. I couldn’t have hoped you’d be here! All these debates are extremely useful, I assure you. Thanks again!!!

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 155 July 5, 2023, 9:16am

Perhaps we first need to have sufficient (non-jhānic) concentration to make nimitta appear and stabilize nimitta, and once nimitta appears and is stable, nimitta can be used to intensify concentration and thus attain jhana.

This means that if the starting (non-jhānic) concentration is not high enough, nimitta may disappear; and if nimitta has been achieved, but is eventually lost, then this may prevent concentration intensification (no appearance of jhana), or even decrease it.

This is a hypothesis.

[DeadBuddha](#) 156 July 5, 2023, 9:18am

Please, does anyone know if ancient schools of Buddhism have asserted that jhanas are felt in the physical body? I had read somewhere that Sautrantika had supported this position, but I'm not sure.

[Ceisiwr](#) 157 July 5, 2023, 9:51am

They did argue that, yes. In the Dhyana sutras the body is still experienced, albeit in an almost translucent way. It's a subtle body, like those in the Brahma realms. I'm also reminded of Paul's argument regarding Christ having a "spiritual body".

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 158 July 5, 2023, 9:56am

MN 128 isn't about the commentarial idea of nimittas. It's about seeing devas, so psychic powers. Sometimes in the suttas the psychic powers are presented as coming before the Jhanas. There is no talk of nimittas in that sense in the earliest texts. Doesn't mean it's wrong to say they occur, it's just they aren't there in the suttas/sutras. It's only in the Abhidharma works and commentaries that they make an appearance.

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 159 July 5, 2023, 9:59am

kumara:

I do think they understand the character of *jhāna* as they understand it. That is why they regard it as optional.

Do you mean that they regard them as optional because they see them as difficult to attain? If so, it's a bad reason.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 160 July 5, 2023, 10:08am

Thank you very much !

[DeadBuddha](#) 161 July 5, 2023, 10:12am

Please, why do you think this speaks of devas?

[Sunyo](#) 162 July 5, 2023, 10:36am

Nickelii:

Sunyo. [AN 5.176](#) does not sound related to jhana. It reads as a teaching for householders that does not go beyond rapture. Rapture in the suttas does not always refer to jhana, as in [SN 12.23](#).

I agree rapture (*pīti*) doesn't always refer to jhānas. However, here it is mentioned in combination with "seclusion" (*viveka*) and "sense objects" (*kāma*) and "unskillful qualities". Those all are terms used in the jhana formulas, so that must be what's meant here, it seems to me. It's the "rapture (and bliss) born of seclusion" mentioned in the standard jhāna formula. See also MN102, where this "rapture born of seclusion" is also mentioned.

Nickelii:

regarding sukha vedana to be a synonym of sukha indriya [...] is possibly an error.

But that's exactly how it's defined in SN48.36–39: "And what is the **faculty** of pleasure? Physical enjoyment, physical pleasure, the enjoyable, pleasant **feeling** that's born from physical contact."

There also isn't a real difference between *nirodha* and *vaya*. I don't think this is the right place to discuss this, though. I believe Ven. Sujato addressed these ideas [here](#).

Pondera:

I've read [MN128](#) and I've noticed the Buddha say that the reason for the disappearance of his vision of lights and forms is his loss of immersion due to the various corruptions.

If the nimittas were the way into jhana, the jhana would disappear with the loss of the nimitta and not the other way around. 🤔

It's commonly acknowledged that the word *samādhi* ("immersion" per Sujato) [doesn't always refer to the jhānas](#). The *samādhi* that's lost here refers to pre-jhāna *samādhi*, in my eyes. The jhānas (i.e. **right** *samādhi*) are only achieved at the end, when the Buddha says: "I've given up my mental corruptions. Now let me develop immersion in three ways." I developed immersion while placing the mind and keeping it connected; without placing the mind, but just keeping it connected; without placing the mind or keeping it connected; with rapture; without rapture; with pleasure; with equanimity." The nimittas are pretty close though, so they can also be called *samādhi*, though not *samma samādhi*.

Edit: exactly what [@DeadBuddha](#) also suggested.

Anyway, so you do think there are always these light/form nimittas inside the jhānas, then? Or how do you interpret MN128?

Brahmali:

The commentaries may occasionally underestimate the importance of *jhāna*, but this does not automatically mean they misunderstand its character.

kumara:

I *do* think they understand the character of *jhāna* as they understand it. That is why they regard it as optional.

Aha. 😊 So venerables 🙏, you both agree the commentaries got something wrong: either the nature of jhānas as meant by the Buddha, or whether one needs jhānas for awakening.

The difference between these two I think is worth considering, though. The nature of the jhānas is something we can directly experience (and I think the compilers of the commentaries did just that). However, whether everybody in the world needs jhānas for awakening, cannot be more than a theory or something taken on faith (unless perhaps the person became fully enlightened without jhānas themselves, or unless they have some special Buddha-like power to know the minds of all beings).

Another difference is that the jhānas are an intrinsic part of the eightfold path. Whether everybody needs them or not is—again—just a theory. Interesting to consider perhaps, but not really a major pragmatic concern, I don't think.

Well, I'll join the both of you: I disagree with some things in the commentaries as well. 😊 But for what it's worth, I myself am quite happy that my ordination tradition agrees with my understanding of the pragmatic part of the jhānas, and that it also sees it reflected in the suttas, like I do. That it disagrees on a theory about beings in general, I don't really mind. (I'm also not 100% convinced that it would be impossible to become awakened without jhānas, exactly because I don't have the power to know, and will probably never have.)

Anyway, we're discussing the commentaries, which isn't really a major concern for all of us, I'm pretty sure, since this is SuttaCentral after all. So let's recall how we got here. Venerable [@Kumara](#), you said that the definition of *kāma* (plural) as the sense objects in the Critical Pāli Dictionary (though you mistook it to be Cone's), was only held by those who follow Ajahn Brahm or the commentaries. That just isn't true, I don't think. Aside from the examples I gave earlier, we got an example right here in this thread, namely Ceisiwr, and there are surely many others. I think it has also been shown in this thread how this definition of the Critical Dictionary is very well supported by the suttas. Unless I missed it, there's not been evidence to the contrary, just a suggestion to translate it as "sensualities". (And perhaps we should also keep in mind which intellectuals wrote and edited the Critical Dictionary, especially the volume that contains *kāma*. I mean, these people each individually understood Pāli better than I ever will, let alone as a team effort.)

I've looked at your book [as you asked me to](#), Venerable, but I still don't understand what "separation from sensualities" pragmatically means to you. Can you explain? 😊 Sorry, but I find this very vague English. You can blame me for that, perhaps, since I'm not a native speaker. But in more than a decade of using the language in daily speech I don't think I've never heard anybody use 'sensuality' in the plural in normal speech.

DeadBuddha:

Thanks again!!!

You have a great ability to get across in writing your sincerity very well. I hope I can do likewise when I thank you for all the good questions, neutrality, and patience.

Also, if you (or others) are interested, a book of transcribed talks on these topics (talks by Ajahn Brahmali and me) is in the works. No promises, and I don't know how long the people will take, but you may want to keep an eye out. 😊 It's going to be good stuff, I think. 😊 (The talks addressed a more general audience, though, not as specific as this thread.)

Ceisiwr:

It's about seeing devas

I believe the Vimuttimagga suggested this too, but a big problem with this is that there is no mention of devas or divine eye in the text at all.

But it does mention developing the jhānas, and that's exactly what the practical instructions of the sutta end with (followed by the Buddha's awakening). When the divine eye is mentioned in the suttas, it always *follows* the jhanas. These light and form nimittas are *before* the jhanas, so that's another indication that they're something different.

DeadBuddha:

Please, why do you think this speaks of devas?

I'll let Ceisiwr answer, but I believe there's an AN sutta that mentions visions and forms, and there those are indeed of devas. But imo that's a completely different context, one that doesn't apply to MN128.

I think another argument that's sometimes brought up for this, is that MN128 was spoken to Anuruddha, who was famous for his ability to see devas. However, that's a very weak and roundabout argument; I don't think I need to explain why. Anuruddha also attained the jhanas, and that's what he's been taught here, not the divine eye.

I mean, the sutta is all about abandoning the hindrances and developing samādhi (*samādhim bhāvēmi*), how much clearer do we need the texts to be? 😊

Anyway, all you lovely people 🥰 thanks all for your contributions. Unless some really interesting replies come up, I'll not be responding here for a while, to spend some more time actually practicing what I preach. 😊 (I'll continue to read along, though.)

3 Likes

[Erik O'Donnell](#) 163 July 5, 2023, 11:24am

Sunyo:

I've looked at your book [as you asked me to](#), Venerable, but I still don't understand what "separation from sensualities" pragmatically means to you.

I am also interested to learn about the pragmatic or phenomenological meaning of separation from sensuality when it is something else than the separation from the five senses.

Just to give some context, the disappearance of the five senses seems like such a clear experiential threshold. It must be very unambiguous whether the five senses are experienced or not; like night and day.

Epistemologically, it also seems logical to me how “hard” jhanas gives insight into Dhamma: it seems like the hard jhana itself would be a direct experience of the five senses being causally dependent on the five hindrances. Like, experientially, the 5-sense-world (kamaloka) feels stable and persistent, but after a hard jhana I would guess that it could feel fickle and unreliable instead. Aka a direct experience of impermanence.

Moreover, logically, if the inventory of experience can be seen to vanish and reappear based on causes, I can see how this would challenge beliefs about a permanent self/essence within the five khandas.

So, it is relatively easy for me to imagine how “hard” jhanas could work within the EBT Dhamma-system to produce awakening outcomes like no longer holding self views.

With “soft” jhanas, it is harder for me to imagine experiential criteria for when they obtain. I also struggle to understand how they produce awakening outcomes.

Like, how can you tell when you’re in a soft jhana? How do they produce awakening outcomes? 😊



5 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 164 July 5, 2023, 11:59am

DeadBuddha:

Please, why do you think this speaks of devas?

There is a sutta in the AN which speak of seeing “light and visions of forms”, which then states that devas are being talked about rather than nimittas. I’ll have to search for it when I’m home. It’s worth pointing out that even if the suttas do say there are nimittas (I don’t think they do, rather it’s clutching at straws) that still wouldn’t mean “Jhana is without the 5 senses” since in other traditions which do say the 5 senses are present in Jhana also talk of nimittas.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 165 July 5, 2023, 12:03pm

Sunyo:

But it does mention developing the jhānas, and that's exactly what the practical instructions of the sutta end with (followed by the Buddha's awakening). When the divine eye is mentioned in the suttas, it always *follows* the jhanas. These light and form nimittas are *before* the jhanas, so that's another indication that they're something different.

Sometimes psychic powers are said to come before the Jhanas. The texts aren't really consistent on this. The problem is that MN 128 can be read my way, because of the AN discourse. It's not really a strong argument for nimittas being present in the texts. A stronger argument would be their occurrence in many early and conflicting traditions, from those that propose an absorbed Jhana to those that do not. And of course, as I said above, nimittas don't prove that Jhana is an absorbed state at all.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 166 July 5, 2023, 12:06pm

Erik_ODonnell:

Like, experientially, the 5-sense-world (kamaloka) feels stable and persistent, but after a hard jhana I would guess that it could feel fickle and unreliable instead. Aka a direct experience of impermanence.

The Kama-loka isn't "the world of 5 senses" but the worlds of sensual desire & sensual pleasures. Those above still have the 5 senses, but they have a subtle and fine body and gain ease and rapture apart from sensual pleasures. A mind only realm comes with the formless attainments, the devas of which have only 4 aggregates.

2 Likes

[Vaddha](#) 167 July 5, 2023, 12:09pm

This is an endless conversation, so I personally prefer not to get caught up in it and instead silently benefit from the contributions of others. I do feel that this point is worth discussing more though considering the prevalence of using MN 128 for the relationship between nimittas and jhānas.

Sunyo:

I believe the Vimuttimagga suggested this too, but a big problem with this is that there is no mention of devas or divine eye in the text at all.

But it does mention developing the jhānas, and that's exactly what the practical instructions of the sutta end with (followed by the Buddha's awakening). When the divine eye is mentioned in the suttas, it always *follows* the jhanas. These light and form nimittas are *before* the jhanas, so that's another indication that they're something different.

Venerable, there are several reasons to think that it is in fact referring to the *dibbacakkhu*. I believe it is almost certainly this with little doubt.

First, we can contextualize the sutta by looking at the one placed immediately before it: MN 127. MN 127 is also about Anuruddha, and it's about him experiencing the divine eye / seeing devas with varying degrees of radiance and light emission. So already we have established before MN 128 that Anuruddha sees lights/forms of devas in meditation. At AN 3.130 we also hear Anuruddha mention that he has the divine eye before awakening. Similarly, SN 14.15 confirms that the people practicing under/around Anuruddha also tended to develop or learn the divine eye from him. So it is no surprise that the suttas with him go into more detail of developing this psychic power and the struggles/obstacles it may entail.

We can also look at the language of MN 128. Why are there both 'light' and 'forms'? In what context is this same language used elsewhere? First, at AN 6.29 and AN 4.41 the *samādhi* of light/radiance is used for knowledge and vision, here specifically seeming to mean the *abhiññās* / divine eye.

More importantly, though, is AN 8.64. Here the Buddha uses the exact same terminology at MN 128, and he explicitly explains that this refers to the divine eye of varying degrees. This sutta also uses the term *ñānadassana* in the context of the divine eye, further fortifying the relationship to the above suttas on developing radiance for seeing other-worldly phenomena.

So after some time, living alone, withdrawn, diligent, keen, and resolute, I perceived light and saw visions. So kho ahaṃ, bhikkhave, aparena samayena appamatto ātāpī pahitatto viharanto obhāsañceva sañjānāmi, rūpāni ca passāmi;
But I didn't associate with those deities, converse, or engage in discussion. no ca kho tāhi devatāhi saddhim santiṭṭhāmi sallapāmi sākacchaṃ samāpajjāmi.

It seems clear to me that the light/radiance (*obhāsa*) is referring to shining the radiance of the mind to various degrees with illuminates different extents of deities and beings or areas of samsāra. This is further explained in MN 127 and also MN 128 when read in this way. The forms (*rūpa*) are the beings themselves that one sees. This also explains the usage of the plural and the quantifiers such as ‘limited’ or ‘limitless’ forms, and limited/limitless light (how far it extends out). This makes very little sense for nimittas: one does not usually, if ever, see limitless lights and forms in meditation as one would see limitless beings with limitless radiance extending from the mind illuminating them.

This explanation also makes perfect sense with the various reactions one may undergo that act as hindrances to those who naturally experience the radiance of the mind and develop the divine eye. This was a clear proclivity of Ven. Anuruddha, and something he likely struggled with as MN 128 documents. From there, one works with one’s reactions and purifies the mind to stabilize and settle it into *jhāna*. We should also keep in mind the nature of oral transmission to add stock passages and elaborate on material towards the end to make a well-rounded discourse; it’s possible, though not necessary, that MN 128 is mostly about this problem and not developing jhānas. This is the main bulk of the discussion anyway.

This does not mean the experience of light nimittas are wrong. In fact, I think it is likely the same experience as described in MN 128, but as applied to the divine eye and seeing beings. One just extends and amplifies the radiance for ‘knowledge and vision [of things in samsāra]’ as several suttas describe. I believe it is a mistake to miss this nuance of MN 128.

Much Mettā 🙏

4 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 168 July 5, 2023, 2:46pm

Hi Venerable,

Well, I said I wouldn’t reply until an interesting reply appeared... it didn’t take long. 😊

So here goes. (Sorry, it’s a bit disorganized, but there’s just too much to say!)

In MN128 the Buddha opens his questioning of the three monks with, “have you attained any *comfortable abidings*?” This “comfortable abiding” (or per Sujato “meditation at ease”) always refers to the jhānas and formless attainments, never to the divine eye. This question would make no contextual sense if he then started explaining how to practice the divine eye.

See:

"Good, good, Anuruddha and friends! But as you live diligently like this, have you achieved any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, *a meditation at ease*?" (MN128)

The answer Anuruddha gives is essentially "no", because the Buddha then explains how to remove the hindrances, something he wouldn't need to do if they attained these meditations.

Now, compare the above with MN31:

"Good, good, Anuruddha and friends! But as you live diligently like this, have you achieved any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a meditation at ease?"

"How could we not, sir? Whenever we want, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, we enter and remain in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. This is a superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a meditation at ease, that we have achieved while living diligent, keen, and resolute."

Here the answer is "yes", and the "meditation at ease" is indeed the jhānas.

This sutta, MN31 Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta, provides a much more direct context for understanding MN128 than MN127. Read them and you'll see. Even the gatekeeper who failed to recognize the Buddha makes an appearance in both!

Now, it appears MN128 happened chronologically *before* MN31, because the former includes the Buddha's travel from Kosambi to Anuruddha and his two friends. In the latter this passage isn't there, but the introduction is otherwise similar, with the three monks still living in the same place. So what happened is, in MN128 the three monks still were developing the jhanas, but in MN31 they mastered them.

Other thoughts:

- MN127 being placed before MN128 is likely just because of the protagonist being the same, namely Anuruddha. The order of suttas in the Majjhima often has no thematic connection. In the Chinese parallels these two texts also aren't sequential. So we shouldn't infer anything from this order.
- I know I said this already, but the practical instructions in MN128 end with the jhānas, not with the divine eye. There is no single mention of the divine eye or deities in MN128.
- Anuruddha attained the divine eye before his awakening, sure. But not before he attained the jhānas. The suttas consistently state that the development of the psychic powers is based on the jhānas, they always

happen after the jhānas. In MN128 the lights and forms happen *before* the jhānas, not after. So it doesn't refer to any psychic power.

- The same principle from a different perspective: the divine eye doesn't lead to the jhānas and development of samādhi. But that is what the sutta would effectively be saying, if the lights and forms were the divine eye.
- The basic structure of the text is that of *sīla* > *samādhi* > *paññā*. The *sīla* is the three monks living simply and being kind to one another, the *samādhi* is the development of the jhānas (through abandoning the hindrances and developing the nimittas), the *paññā* happens at the end, when the Buddha speaks of his own awakening. I don't know how the structure *sīla* > *divine eye* > *paññā* would fit other suttas.
- When the sutta mentions "excessive meditation upon forms" which makes "sāmadhi fall away" the word for "meditation" is *atini-jhāyati*. To be clear, this *jhāyati* doesn't mean jhāna proper. However, it means some sort of meditation, I'd say. It doesn't seem mean looking at devas. (Or is the word used elsewhere for looking at devas?)
- It should also say "my divine eye fell away" when the hindrances appear, if the divine eye is what they were practicing, not "my sāmadhi fell away".
- You said, "This makes very little sense for nimittas: one does not usually, if ever, see limitless lights and forms in meditation." But one does, right before the jhana when the edges of the lights or forms disappear. Also, the term limitless (*appamaṇa*) is often used with reference to meditation in other contexts as well, like the "limitless liberation of mind". Even in MN127 which you mentioned, where it is a simile for *mahaggata citta*, "expansive mind". Not expansive deities.
- Consider the parallelism in: "What's the cause, what's the reason why *my light and vision of forms vanish*?" It occurred to me: 'Doubt arose in me, and because of that *my immersion (samādhi) fell away*.' Here the vanishing of "my lights and vision" is analogous to the falling away of "my *samādhi*", not for losing the divine eye.
- Notice the Buddha mentions "*my light*" (*me obhāso*) in MN128, not the light of others, like the deities.
- The title of the sutta itself is "minor (upa) defilements (kilesa)" (or Sujato "corruptions"). The defilements are the hindrances left before the jhānas, as described in many other suttas. (I'll give some below.) The *minor* defilements are the final hindrances before jhānas. As Āṇalayo notes: "This list of mental obstructions [in MN128] does not mention the first two of the five hindrances, sensual desire and aversion. Their absence indicates that the meditative development described in the present discourse sets in at a more advanced stage, when these two comparatively gross mental defilements have been subdued and a minimum degree of mental tranquillity has already been established." This is *exactly* when the nimittas happen: when the hindrances are weak. Sensual desire and anger are abandoned at that time. Good observation by Ven. Āṇalayo.
- What I'm saying is, if the sutta were about the divine eye, the title makes little contextual sense.
- SN46.33 has the same name Upakkilesa Sutta (with an alternative manuscript name Kilesa Sutta) and here these defilements are the hindrances to the *jhānas*. The upakkilesas have the exact same function in MN128: they obstruct the jhānas, not the divine eye.
- See also SN47.8: "As they meditate ... their mind enters **immersion**, their corruptions (*upakkilesa*) are given up."

- And MN60: “When their mind has become immersed in **samādhi** like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions (*upakkilesa*), pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable”
- Now, how many suttas talk about these *upakkilesas* with reference to developing the divine eye?
- And what other sutta opposes the divine eye to the hindrances? Compare this to how often are the *jhānas* opposed to the hindrances. Again, abandoning the hindrances leads to *jhānas*, not to the divine eye. And that’s exactly what the text says.

I could go on like this, but, I don’t know—to me it couldn’t be any clearer for a sutta to about developing *jhānas* than this one. I’m not even sure why I’m even explaining it, to be honest! 😊
Because if people don’t see that, I don’t know what to do.

I can admit a bias, though. Because how we read such texts definitely also has to do with our practice. To me, the hindrances the Buddha mentions so *perfectly* fit what happens with the nimittas. Perceptions of diversity are those fireworks nimittas for example, or those that keep changing color. Those aren’t very useful. Excessive meditation on forms is focusing too much on the shape of the nimitta instead of staying with the center, which doesn’t lead to *jhāna*. The fear and excitement that arises when nimittas arise is also extremely recognizable. (PS. why would you fear the divine eye?) Forms and lights are two types of nimittas that are (or *can* be) distinct but both are useful. Even the instruction “I’ll **make sure** that *hindrance* X will not arise in me again” is super applicable and brilliant. Because if you start thinking this kind of stuff WHILE you are perceiving the nimittas, your mind is usually gets too active, which destroys the nimittas. You have to set up mindfulness in advance, as the Buddha instructs. And then the similes of the quail and the treasures! Brilliant. I really can’t see how all this refers to the divine eye.

Perhaps other people have their bias. Maybe they just don’t *want* to have a sutta talk about “commentarial” ideas of nimittas’, because it doesn’t fit their practice. Sorry for bluntly guessing. But perhaps they can explain what things like “excessive meditation on form” of “perceptions of diversity” mean in context of the divine eye.

The suttas do seem to make a connection between attaining nimittas and being reborn in a certain realm, something I didn’t realize before. Thanks for that, Venerable. But I don’t think this is what this sutta is about. 😊 That’s requires way too much inference to me, and ignoring what the text actually *mentions*, namely the development of *sāmadhi*.

(And to be completely honest, it’s kind of “frustrating” that many people don’t see this in their practice, apparently. I so wish that they would! Or that I could upload my experiences into the brains of others, lol. Because I’m sure they’d be like, “OMG, that’s exactly what the Buddha’s talking about!” Anyway, that’s off topic.)

Much metta also to you. 😊🙏

3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 169 July 5, 2023, 3:49pm

Ok, one more reply. This topic is too fascinating for me to let go. 🌀 (Also I'm in a vihara with easy internet access atm, so that's not helpful when people keep posting interesting things... Please stop! 😞)

Erik_ODonnell:

With "soft" jhanas, it is harder for me to imagine experiential criteria for when they obtain. I also struggle to understand how they produce awakening outcomes.

Hey Erika,

In Ven. Kumara's book Ven. Thanissaro is quoted to say: "If whole areas of our awareness are blocked off, how can you gain all-around insight?" I haven't seen how venerable Thanissaro suggests insight arises from all-around awareness. Perhaps others more familiar with his teachings can clarify, that would be good to discuss.

(To be complete, the book also relates "blotting out large areas of awareness" to being adept at denial and being a sociopath. 😞 This implies that deep-jhana meditators are likely to be dissociated sociopaths. Nice and collegial... 🙄)

Anyway, in my experience it is *exactly* by letting go of parts of our awareness that one can understand things. Because the more areas of awareness we let go, the closer to nibbāna we are! This is stated extremely clearly in AN9.34, my favorite sutta. 😊 The affliction of the five senses, for example, can only be understood by entering the first jhana where these "sensory perceptions" have disappeared. Then having those senses come back is considered an "affliction".

It's like fish living in water can't understand what water is. We can't understand suffering without seeing peace, without seeing that suffering disappear. And we also can't understand impermanence if things are continually in our awareness. It's the same with anattā. If you attain a jhana afterwards you're like, "Wow, these five senses really weren't part of 'me'". If all things are constantly in your awareness, I don't know how any of these insights could happen on a deep level.

(Now, just falling asleep is also letting go of awareness, but that's very different from jhānas where you're super aware. This super strong awareness is another reason why jhānas are required. And you don't tend to get that from focusing on your body.)

Also, as you imply, to understand the hindrance of sense desire, one needs to be able to let go of all the senses. I mean, sense desire for food and sex is obvious, you need no meditation for that! But sense desire includes any kind of attachment to the senses. And these attachments will only become apparent when meditation starts to move beyond the five senses into the nimittas. (It's one reason

why people get scared at this stage, the fear is often just a derivative of sense desire.) If you can't let go of the body, it's because of attachment to it.

Also the lack of control one has in jhāna provides excellent opportunity to see anattā. If we're consciously "spreading pleasure through the body", as some people understand the jhānas, to me it sounds like you're controlling your happiness. That's exactly counterproductive to understanding anattā:

But because feeling is not-self, it leads to affliction. And you can't compel feeling : 'May my feeling be like this! May it not be like that!'

The list goes on, of how contrary the two approaches are when it comes to insight.

I think your question deserves a thread of its own. It's an important angle, not often considered in these discussions.

4 Likes

[Vaddha](#) 170 July 5, 2023, 5:18pm

Hello again, venerable. Thank you for your input 😊

I think there was a miscommunication that should be clarified: I'm not saying that MN 128 is about developing the divine eye rather than jhāna; I'm saying that the bulk of the text is about meditative experiences of the divine eye (on varying scales) mixed with hindering reactions that cause one to not be able to absorb fully into deeper states of jhāna. I think that this ranges from the experience of basic lights to light illuminating forms of beings (the divine eye).

Sunyo:

Here the vanishing of "my lights and vision" is analogous to the falling away of "my *samādhi*", not for losing the divine eye.

I assume you agree that one using the divine eye is not experience everyday sensual experiences or filled with hindrances. It's done from a place of samādhi, a unified and radiant mind which allows one to see other things not normally available to the senses. So yes, the samādhi falls away because one is having reactions to experiences within the samādhi which are the light/forms.

I also assume we agree that the divine eye is not exercised in jhāna. While in a jhāna attainment, the object/field of awareness is the pervasive vedanā described in the formulas. The divine eye is done

when one's mind is in samādhi and it is *projected out* to illuminate the vision of other things. So again, this means that one is in some weak state of samādhi outside jhāna when using the divine eye. This could be before or after, depending on how one's meditation is going and the mind's proclivities.

Sunyo:

Maybe they just don't *want* to have a sutta talk about “commentarial” ideas of nimittas', because it doesn't fit their practice.

The commentary to MN 128 (as pointed out by another user here) says that it refers to the divine eye:

dassanañca rūpānanti dibbacakkhunā rūpadassanañca sañjānāma.

So clearly this reading I'm proposing is not anti-commentarial. It's the opposite.

As I clarified at the end of my post, I don't think the idea of nimittas as understood in later literature is wrong or contradicted by the suttas. I even think they *are* part of MN 128; but I think MN 128 is taking it to the full extent in terms of describing the divine eye. I believe that if one is able to get past the hindrances arising from the experience of mental radiance and seeing forms (which can range from a basic nimitta light to the divine eye, depending on the extent of the radiance/light etc.), then one can finally enter jhāna. So these are preliminary stages *before* jhāna still, including the divine eye. Some people may develop it from the 4th jhāna (the ideal place in the suttas), but others seem to be able to use the light of the 'nimitta' to develop or naturally have the divine eye.

Sunyo:

what things like “excessive meditation on form” of “perceptions of diversity” mean in context of the divine eye.

Focusing too much on the beings one is seeing (the forms), or having a perception of lots of beings scattered around that leaves the mind without a solid object of focus to contain it, are examples. I will reiterate that I think this can apply to basic nimittas—as you described—or to the more developed 'nimittas' which are actually seeing other realms of existence and radiant light. It's a matter of scale/degree, not X or Y, I think.

Sunyo:

Notice the Buddha mentions “my light” (*me obhāso*)

As I said, I think the light (*obhāsa*) is the light of the meditator's mind which extends out to illuminate forms. So it makes perfect sense that the Buddha would call it 'my light' — it's like a divine flashlight projecting out.

Sunyo:

The order of suttas in the Majjhima often has no thematic connection.

I agree this is only a minor point, but it's also not just the order. The content of MN 127 and MN 128 is suspiciously related. Radiance, lights, seeing forms, deep meditation, Anuruddha. I still think we should consider MN 128 with MN 127 in mind as at least context for the character of Anuruddha and his meditative experiences.

Sunyo:

What I'm saying is, if the sutta were about the divine eye, the title makes little contextual sense.

The sutta is about meditative experiences and hindrances related to them that prevent one from being fully absorbed in jhāna attainment and developing higher wisdom. On this, we agree. I think we agree more than you may have thought, and I hope this post has clarified what I meant some more to demonstrate that.

Sunyo:

(PS. why would you fear the divine eye?)

Seeing ghosts or beings one has never seen before can be extremely frightening. Even people who do things like 'astral projection' can have terrifying experiences where they encounter what they perceive as other beings. It's a completely new realm of experience, and people normally have a range of strong emotional experiences to new, unknown, other-worldly things — be they nimittas in the mind or the forms of literal gods. Actually, it reminds me of all the passages in the bible where people see radiant angles or the form of God himself shining with light and they are literally frozen in fear or terrified to death.

I think there is a lot one can learn from and see in one's own practice in MN 128. So again, I agree. But I think the scope is broader and includes the divine eye, and this is also the understanding of the commentaries, some later manuals, as well as the same language used elsewhere in the canon to refer to it (AN).

Mettā 🙏

4 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 171 July 5, 2023, 5:28pm

Sunyo:

Perhaps other people have their bias. Maybe they just don't *want* to have a sutta talk about "commentarial" ideas of nimittas', because it doesn't fit their practice. Sorry for bluntly guessing. But perhaps they can explain what things like "excessive meditation on form" of "perceptions of diversity" mean in context of the divine eye.

We all have biases Bhante. Personally I used to argue that Jhana is an absorbed state based on the suttas. I even used the same arguments you have here. Today my view is different, that's all. At one point I was an Abhidhammika too.

As I said I'm not against the idea of nimittas, I just don't think they are in the early texts. And that's ok, because the early texts don't contain every detail. The details we have say there is mental rapture and pleasure and bodily ease, occurring with wholesome thoughts and intentions continually repelling the hindrances.

3 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 172 July 5, 2023, 8:17pm

Sunyo:

I was talking about the gloss "i.e. the five objects of sensual pleasure viz. [or "that is to say"] rūpa, sadda, gandha, rasa, poṭṭhabba". To me that reads as if the writers intended it to refer to all sense objects, regardless of whether they are pleasant.

But let's agree to disagree on that, since I can understand how you read it differently, and it's boring to argue over dictionaries!

The same dictionary goes on to state that the definition of the kāmagūṇa are sights etc which are manāpā, but yes lets not argue of dictionaries.

Sunyo:

Then still I'd say that if pleasant sights, sounds, etc. are abandoned, it is only natural that unpleasant sights, sounds, etc. are *also* abandoned. This is also what [AN5.176](#) says: that in the

first jhāna there are no pleasure *and* pain connected with the sense objects (*kāmas*). So, to come back to the original question of this topic, this also indicates that the first jhāna is already beyond physical pleasure and pain, that physical pain doesn't end only at the fourth jhāna. The sutta also clearly separates this type of pleasure and pain from the pleasure and pain that come from the unskillful (i.e. the hindrances), showing that *kāmas* in context of the jhānas is not sensual desire (or “sensuality”), which is already included in the hindrances—as you agree (but others don't).

I agree that *kāmā* are sensual objects, specifically pleasing sensual objects. To me AN 5.176 is saying that whilst in jhāna there is no pleasure occurring because of pleasing sights etc, nor is there any pain occurring, because one isn't engrossed in them or dejected because of not having them/losing them. Where does this entail no 5 sensory experience of any kind? Apart from sensual pleasures, there can still be sense experience which is not of sensual pleasures. Namely the tranquil body. Feeling tranquillity, one experiences spiritual bliss. It's spiritual, because its not based on pleasing physical contact with a pleasing physical object (say the touch of a lover). I'm open to the idea that there is no mental or physical pain either whilst in jhāna, because of *somanassa* and *sukha*, but that physical discomfort can arise again due to the continuous *sasaṅkhāraniggayhavāritagato*. I see the progression as follows

Abandon mental displeasure, the hindrances (*domanassa*) > 1st jhāna

Dukkha arises (because of excessive *vitakka-vicāra*) and is abandoned > 2nd jhāna

Abandon mental pleasure (*somanassa* occurring because of rapture) > 3rd jhāna

Abandon physical ease (*sukha*) > 4th jhāna

Which results in pure equanimity towards mind and body. At this stage the senses will begin to fade away IMO. And this makes sense, because what follows then is the formless if the meditator can and so wishes.

And if your body is in pain, you can't escape it by walking into a forest. So it has to mean something more deep than that, and to me it makes most sense if this means not being able to feel the body at all. That's how you escape from bodily pain.

Or through the substitution of opposites. Bodily *sukha* displacing bodily pain.

To me that's not a natural reading, for reasons I've given, but also because it is pragmatically rather meaningless. Let's take the enlightened, who have no hindrances all the time, so “unwholesome states” are always abandoned by them. In your interpretation, since the only other thing they have to fulfill is “bodily seclusion”, walking into the forest or hut makes the

enlightened beings enter jhāna. That makes no sense to me. And that's also what makes this interpretation vague, aside from pleasure being a personal preference, and it not taking into account that you can't walk away from physical pain.

In the suttas we also consistently see the Buddha sitting down (or lying down in [DN16](#)) before he enters jhana, and he did so only *after* he already entered the forest a while before. Also, you can enter jhāna *without* going into a forest or being in isolation. In [DN16](#) the Buddha attained it in a village while people were standing around him talking. Your interpretation of *vivicceva kāmehi* to move to a hut or forest doesn't seem to align with these things.

They wouldn't just have to walk into a forest. For the Arahants and Buddhas they have completely uprooted the taints. As such they don't have to go through the process of bodily seclusion and then abandoning the hindrances. They have already done all of the work. All they have to do to enter Jhāna is begin to meditate and reflect on their noble state, which produces joy and rapture. They still have to intend and fabricate those emotions to enter Jhāna, otherwise they would be in Jhāna all the time which I think we both agree is absurd. For people like me however we have to go through the whole process and train. We have to practice sense restraint and virtue and then go to a forest or hut, a secluded place, and then mentally seclude ourselves. This is why the Buddha liked quiet secluded places. They are conducive to the monks in training for attaining Jhāna, even though, as you say, he could enter Jhāna whenever he pleased. You can't really compare the training to what Buddhas and Arahants can do, who have completed the task and mastered the mind.

No, that's not the escape in this sutta ([AN9.42](#)), because the confinements for the higher states are all certain perceptions or experiences, not a desire for those things or an obsession over them. For example, in the "dimension of infinite space", "Whatever perception of the dimension of infinite space has not ceased is the confinement there." The perception *itself* is the confinement, not the desire for it. By extent, the confinement before the first jhāna is also a certain perception, namely the perception of the five senses. This fits when for example [AN9.34](#) says that "perceptions of sense objects" are abandoned. Or in Ven. Sujato's translation:

While a mendicant is in such a meditation, should perceptions accompanied by sensual pleasures beset them due to loss of focus, that's an affliction for them.

This also shows that withdrawing from sensual pleasures is not just walking into a forest or hut, as you argue. Otherwise these things wouldn't come back "to beset" you while you're still meditating! But they do come back. And they are said to do so, in Ven Sujato's translation at least, "due to loss of focus". This means that when you lose focus on the mind, then the five senses come back into awareness. (I'm not sure if I agree with this translation, although it doesn't really matter for my point.)

My understanding is that confinement and distraction regarding sensual pleasures is something like this

“Mendicants, before my awakening—when I was still unawakened but intent on awakening—I thought: ‘My mind might often stray towards the five kinds of sensual stimulation that I formerly experienced—which have passed, ceased, and perished—or to those in the present, or in the future a little.’

Then it occurred to me: ‘In my own way I should practice diligence, mindfulness, and protecting the mind regarding the five kinds of sensual stimulation that I formerly experienced—which have passed, ceased, and perished.’ - SN 35.117

Beings in the kāma-loke are confined because they live their lives obsessed with sensual pleasures (sex, food, money, drink, drugs, music, hair, makeup, clothes, games, tv, films, books etc) and so their minds are never still, always being pulled this way and that. When one though secludes from sensual pleasures, when they physical and mentally renounce them fully, then their mind becomes still, quiet, tranquil and calm. What is left? The disturbance of intentional thoughts. Then that is abandoned and so on. During the 1st Jhāna, if the mind is still weak, then it can be distracted with desire for and thoughts of sensual pleasures again.

Notice also that the sensual pleasures are called an affliction, which also shows that the painful side is also included. Kāma isn't just the pleasant side of things, it includes the painful, which is even more afflictive than the pleasant side.

Don't you think you are possibly taking this a bit too literally Bhante? In that sutta “Nothingness” is also said to be affliction. Is Nothingness painful? In a metaphorical sense, yes.

As I read this, those thoughts connected to the dhamma are still happening before the jhāna. The first jhāna happens when the sutta later says: “But there comes a time when that mind is stilled internally; it settles, unifies, and becomes immersed in samādhi. That immersion is peaceful and sublime and tranquil and unified, not held in place by forceful suppression.” The first jhana is peaceful and sublime. Anyway, as you say, this is digressing. Now we're discussing vitakka and vicāra. Let's not do that now.

Have you read the parallel Bhante? Its clear there that the meditation which is intentionally managed and controlled (sasaṅkhāraniggayhavāritagato) is the 1st Jhāna, because what follows it as the other Jhānas

Moreover, the monk parts (ways) with the many examinations and reflections and even attains the second, third, and the fourth dhyānas. Thus, the samāpattis are unmixed, peaceful, and pure, and they part (ways) with the afflictions. They are soft, pliable, authentic, and immovable. With regards to this or that āyatana,

if he desires to seek to make a realization of his comprehension, he is able to attain that realization - SĀ 1246

How is the 1st Jhāna intentionally managed and controlled? Because the intentional thoughts of vitakka-vicāra, of contentment, good-will etc are successfully repelling the hindrances. This meditation however is not fully peaceful, due to V&V, when compared to the other Jhānas. This is why we only see ekodibhāvaṃ in the 2nd Jhāna.

But the kāmagaṇa are “defined” not by what causes the feeling but just as “(pleasant) touches perceived by the body”, aka bodily feelings. Anything perceived through the body counts as a “touch” (kāya-viññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā). Whether this comes from an orgasm or some meditation experience is irrelevant. It remains a pleasant “touch”, so according to [AN9.42](#) it has no place in the jhānas, and that is regardless of how we interpret kāmagaṇa.

The bodily kāmagaṇa isn't bodily feelings any more than the visual kāmagaṇa is a feeling. They are alluring objects, not feelings. Things we find attractive, not the feeling it self. They are objects we have marked with signs as being pleasurable and desirable.

Not that it matters for what the suttas say, but where do the commentaries do so (not the sub-commentaries, some of which are written in the last handful of centuries)? The Visuddhimagga talks of sukha as being experienced (1) by “the *mental* body” and (2) by the “material body” only *after emerging* from the jhānas, so not in the jhāna itself. I'm not too fond of this commentarial “mental body” idea, as it misses the idiomatic use of kāya of “person”, but here the Visuddhimagga clearly doesn't mean the sukha in the jhanas to be physical. The Abhidhamma also defines sukha in the jhānas as mental, and afaik it's not often that the commentaries depart blatantly from the Abhidhamma, so if you can give a reference, that'd be helpful. Here's what I know of:

In the discussion of the 1st Jhāna the Visuddhimagga says

100. But as to the other word: pleasing (sukhana) is bliss (sukha). Or alternatively: it thoroughly (SUpphu) devours (KHĀdati), consumes (KHAóati),³⁰ bodily and mental affliction, thus it is bliss (sukha). It has gratifying as its characteristic. Its function is to intensify associated states. It is manifested as aid. -

CHAPTER IV The Earth Kasīṇa.

Later on the Visuddhimagga states that the 5 senses aren't occurring in any jhāna. Why does it do this? I think Ven. Buddhaghosa was trying to harmonise different views within the tradition and the commentaries. For example, if we look at the commentary to DN 2 we see that it defines the sukha of the 1st jhāna in bodily terms quite explicitly (forgive my very rough translation).

226. So vivicceva kāmehi...pe... paṭhamam jhānam upasampajja viharatītiādi pana upacārasamādhinā samāhite citte uparivisesadassanattam appanāsamādhinā samāhite citte tassa samādhino pabhedadassanattam vuttanti veditabbam. Imameva kāyanti imam karajakāyam. Abhisandeti temeti sneheti, sabbattha pavattapītisukham karoti. Parisandeti samantato sandeti. Paripūreti vāyunā bhastam viya pūreti. Parippharatīti samantato phusati. Sabbāvato kāyassāti assa bhikkhuno sabbakoṭṭhāsavato kāyassa kiñci upādinna kasantatipavattiṭṭhāne chavimaṃsalohitānugataṃ aṇumattampi ṭhānam paṭhamajjhānasukhena aphuṭam nāma na hoti.

“By means of seclusion from sensual pleasures...1st jhāna is arrived at and dwelt in” and so the citta concentrated in access concentration attains distinction concentrated in absorption concentration. That concentrated citta should be classed as and understood as being for the sake of seeing. “This exact same body” This physical body. “Fills up” Makes the naturally occurring rapture and pleasure drench and moisten everywhere. “Completely infuses” Experiences all around. “Whole body” This bhikkhu’s body, complete in all its parts, in the place where the continuity that is grasped occurs accompanied by skin, flesh and blood there is not even the tiniest part that is not pervaded with the happiness of the first jhāna.”

What’s more it states that this occurs not in access concentration but whilst in jhāna proper. As I say, the sub-commentary makes this even more clear. On the Vibhaṅga the I can’t recall if it is talking about supramundane jhānas or mundane ones. I know that when it comes to the awakening factors the Sammohavinodani says it is talking about the supramundane path moment, although it acknowledges that other Theravādas say they also apply to the mundane. Once again, we see divergent views here.

What I was trying to say is that [MN80](#) (in this translation anyway) appears to equate kāmagaṇa to “the senses”, not to the pleasure that comes from them. (Haven’t had time to look at the Pāli yet.)

Iti kāmehi kāmasukham, kāmasukhā kāmaggasukham tattha aggamakkhāyat

‘From sensual pleasures (pleasing sights, sounds etc) comes sensual pleasure. From sensual pleasures comes the best kind of sensual pleasure, which is said to be the best thing there.’

I never met one of them, but I’d say they spend most of the time in jhānas, and that they are in the rūpa “loka” at that time. The lower heavens where the lower gods spend most time using the 5 senses are still part of the kāma loka. The Brahmas can still come back to lower realms, like when Brahma invited the Buddha to teach. That’s when they have five senses, but not while they are in jhānas. Them spending most of the time in jhāna is what separates them from the lower kāma-loka gods, is what I think. (I also wonder how much of this Brahmas coming down to the human realm is to be taken literally, but anyway.)

They still have 5 aggregates, though, even in the jhānas, because rūpa extends beyond what we call material or “sensual”. That’s why non-returners, who are no longer attached to the five senses, are still said to have the fetter of desire for rūpa. This refers to desire for the jhānas, I think you’ll agree. But since they no more sense desire, it has to refer to some desire for a mental thing.

When a mendicant visits Brahma in his realm, Brahma “takes him by the arm”

Then the Great Brahmā took that mendicant by the arm, led him off to one side, and said to him, ‘Mendicant, these gods think that there is nothing at all that I don’t know and see and understand and realize. That’s why I didn’t answer in front of them. But I too do not know where these four primary elements cease with nothing left over. Therefore, mendicant, the misdeed is yours alone, the mistake is yours alone, in that you passed over the Buddha and searched elsewhere for an answer to this question. Mendicant, go to the Buddha and ask him this question. You should remember it in line with his answer.’ - DN 11

As I say, I don’t think the kāma-loka means “the realm of the 5 senses” but rather the realm of sensual pleasures. This is why all the gods above us are described as still being obsessed with sensual pleasures, rather than sense experience itself.

Digital Pāli Dictionary

kāmaloka

masc. world of the pleasures

In [DN31](#) there is a distinction between three types of rūpa, on which Sujato notes:

“Visible and resistant [form]” refers to material phenomena perceivable by the eye.

“Invisible and resistant” is a shorthand for material phenomena that are not perceivable by the eye, but which nonetheless impinge on other senses, such as sounds or smells. *“Invisible and non-resistant” includes form perceived solely in the mind.*

The latter rūpa is the rūpa of the jhānas, and this is the rūpa experienced by the Brahmas when they are in their natural state of jhāna.

The “invisible and non-resistant” would include things like the water element, in the Abhidhamma commentaries. DN 31 is a proto-Abhidhamma text.

In some suttas rūpa includes besides the four elements also a fifth element, that of space, and this is what is present in the jhānas. It’s a mental perception of space, though, not a physical one (although you can’t feel space with the body anyway). This “space” sort of falls apart in the first

arūpa (I'm presuming and going by what I've been told, so I may change my mind later), hence the first arūpa is "the dimension of boundless space". Space, having no more boundaries, has become kind of ill-defined here, hence now it's called "formless".

After that state, the mental awareness also starts to cease in the formless attainments, ending eventually in the cessation of perception. So it's a natural progression: entering the jhānas (the rūpa attainments) the five sense world (kāma) has ceased. In the formless the object of the mind (the rūpa) starts cease. In the final attainment the mental awareness itself ceases as well.

Well sure, with the perception of form there can be the perception of space since one can't exist without the other hence neither can be said to be "real", like long & short, but this relates to our previous conversation.

But is this about jhāna or about more general sense restraint? Since it talks about mindfulness and guarding the mind, it's not yet samādhi in the sense of the jhānas.

It's about sense restraint. It was a reply to Erik regarding still desiring things even if we don't sense them.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 173 July 5, 2023, 8:27pm

I find these passages quite interesting from Venerable Kumārajīva's "Chán fǎ yào jiě (Essential Explanation of The Method of Dhyāna), regarding how the body begins to change to the subtle form of the rūpa-loka during Jhāna

Question: How can one recognize the signs of single-mindedness?

Answer: **When the mind dwells on an image, the body would be soft, gentle, and blissful.** All anger, anxiety, grief, and other afflictive mental dharmas are ceased.¹⁷⁴ The mind acquires swift blissfulness never before experienced, which surpasses the five desires. **Because the mind is pure without any defilement, the body will shine brightly. It is like a pure and clean mirror [shining] the light externally, or like the shining light of bright pearl that appears, illumines, and manifests in the pure water.** After having seen these signs, the cultivator's mind is calm, tranquil, joyful, and delightful. It is like a thirsty person, who digs the earth searching for the water. If he sees the moist mud, then he will get the water soon. The cultivator practices in a similar way as such; at the beginning of the practice, it is like digging a dry earth for a longtime without stopping; as he sees the signs of moisture, he knows himself

that he will get the water soon. Having known by oneself that one will attain the meditative samādhi soon, one must diligently concentrate, joyfully believe, gather the mind, and move it to enter the deep samādhi. Give rise to the thought that —I have already cursed the five desires. See those who seek after their desires as extremely detestable, as one sees a dog, who, unable to get good food, chews on stinking manure. According to these various conditions, you should curse desire as a fault. One's mind gives rise to sympathize with those who experience the five desires. Their own minds have blissfulness already, but they do not know how to seek for it. Instead, they seek for the external impurity and faulty joyfulness. Throughout day and night, the cultivator should always practice diligently various wholesome dharmas, which support the achievement of meditative samādhi.

Question: What are the marks of attaining the first dhyāna?

Answer: **At first, one uses proper mindfulness to admonish and halt five desires.** Although one has not attained the ground [of the first dhyāna], the mind is joyful, delightful, soft, harmonious, and gentle; **the body has bright light.** **When one attains the first dhyāna, its mark is that it continuously changes, increases, and excels [than before]. cause **the four elements of the Desire Realm spread fully all over the body, which is soft, harmonious, gentle, and joyful signs, and the mind leaves bad desire and unwholesome deed, then the samādhi of single-minded thought can cause one having joy and happiness.**¹⁸³ **Forms created in the Form Realm have the feature of bright light. Hence, the cultivator sees the wonderful and bright light emitting from the body internally and externally.** The mind of the cultivator changes differently. Within the angry situation, one does not get angry. Within the joyful situation, one does not have [much] joy. The eight kinds of worldly dharmas cannot move the cultivator.¹⁸⁴ Faith, respect, shame, and conscience largely change and multiply. As for the clothes, food, and drink, one does not crave and attach to them. One only considers various wholesome deeds and meritorious morality as valuable, and others are worthless. One does not attach to even the five celestial desires, how much more the five impure desires of the secular world. For those who have attained the first dhyāna, these are the features.

Again, when one attains the first dhyāna, the mind is greatly surprised and joyful. As a poor man at last acquires the treasury storage, he is greatly surprised and joyful. He thought that: —During the beginning, middle, and last watches of the morning, I have cultivated diligently and ascetically the first dhyāna. Now I have attained the good retribution, which is true without falsity. These wonderful and joyful experiences are as such, but other sentient beings are insane, confused, stubborn, and foolish. They are sunk into the impurity and non-blissfulness of five desires. How pitiful they are. **The blissfulness of the first dhyāna is spread all over the body internally and externally. As the water soaks into dry earth, it is wet and moist inside and outside. The experience of blissfulness of the Desire Realm cannot spread through the body and mind.** The fire of sexual desire and anger in the Desire Realm burns the body. Entering the cooling and blissful pool of first dhyāna is the foremost way in extinguishing

the fire of mental afflictions. As when it is too hot, one jumps into the cooling and pure pool. After one has attained the first dhyāna already, one thinks about the original practice of spiritual path or other conditions, namely the samādhi of Buddha name's recitation, or the mindfulness of the body's impurity, or the contemplation of the loving-kindness mind, or others. Why is that? Utilizing the power of contemplation helps the cultivator to attain the meditative samādhi and again enter deeply. Then, the original contemplations will become many times more pure and clear.

There is a form of nimitta here, but there is also a bodily experience. The body and the external elements start to being subtle, translucent-like but a physical side to the experience still remains. Rather than a mental image, the body and external forms are becoming transformed to the meditator. We also see something like this talked about in the Visuddhimagga, but its under the section on "corruptions of insight", where the body is blissful and starts to emit light.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 174 July 5, 2023, 8:29pm

Vaddha:

I think there was a miscommunication that should be clarified

Venerable 🙏

There may be some miscommunication indeed, for which I apologize. Partly that's because I tried to reply to you and Ceisiwr at the same time, which wasn't very wise of me. 😊 But partly that's also because (and you can blame it on my limited imagination) what you're saying just doesn't make sense to me! 😊 The divine eye and development of samādhi are very different things, placed at very different parts of the practice. I don't see why they would be mixed up in the way you propose, both from the sutta perspective and a pragmatic one.

OK, I'll start of with this: I'll grant you that some of the terminology in AN8.64 is very similar to MN128. But there could be other reasons for this, having to do with oral literature. There are other phrases in the suttas that are virtually identical but refer to very different things.

Maybe you can also grant me a few things? 😊 Here's some more to consider:

This [divine eye] could be before or after [jhānas], depending on how one's meditation is going and the mind's proclivities.

Technically speaking I could suppose that's true, that someone can have the divine eye before the jhānas. I don't know. But I *do* know that it's not how the suttas tend to speak about it. Do you have any clear canonical reference where this is the case?

Regardless, it seems that it wasn't the case for the Buddha himself. And that matters, because we shouldn't forget that the bulk of MN128, although spoken to Anuruddha and friends, actually is about the Buddha's *own* practice before his awakening. Now, in all other places where he talks about this Bodhisattva period, he developed the divine eye only *after* he developed the jhānas. See for example MN19, where the order of his practice is: Abandoning hindrances (of thoughts) > jhānas > threefold knowledge (including divine eye) > awakening. But in MN128 in your interpretation it must have been: Divine eye > hindrances > abandon hindrances > jhānas > awakening.

Put differently, why would the Bodhisattva have used his divine eye, apparently getting disturbed by the hindrances it caused, then conclude, "I've given up my mental corruptions. Now let me develop immersion in three ways (i.e. jhānas and beyond)," and *then* get awakened. This fits nothing any other sutta I know of says, not only on the Bodhisattva's own practice, but also on the relation of the jhānas to the divine eye, and on the divine eye's relation to awakening (which is to understand kamma).

Or am I missing something here? 🤔

As I said, I think the light (*obhāsa*) is the light of the meditator's mind which extends out to illuminate forms. So it makes perfect sense that the Buddha would call it 'my light' — it's like a divine flashlight projecting out.

The idea is interesting (can I say unique?), but it doesn't fit MN127 on which you heavily rely, where the light is said to be of the deities themselves: "some deities there *have* limited radiance, while some have limitless radiance." It also doesn't fit AN8.64 where the light also seems to refer to the deities themselves, not the Buddha's "flashlight": "I perceived light and saw visions. And I associated with *those* deities." Finally, if the light was a beam which illuminates forms, the Buddha also wouldn't say "I *perceived* light and forms". He would say something like, "I perceived forms *with* light". The light is the thing perceived here, not the thing that does the perceiving.

In MN128 it is called "*my* light" because it is the light inside of his own mind, is what I say. It has nothing to do with deities. Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila also perceived lights in their own minds. It may be nothing of relevance, but Nandiya's single verse at Thag1.25 also mentions light. And what does he say? "One whose *mind* is often filled with light". Here the word for light (*obhāsa*) is actually the same as in MN128, contrary to MN127 where it's a different word.

Now, on similar sounding words which are about very different topics: AN6.29 and AN4.41, which you mentioned earlier, don't speak about the divine eye or perception of devas. They mention "the perception of light, concentrating on the perception of *day* regardless of whether it's night or day."

The light here is not of deities, it is simply daylight, and an imagined (perceived) daylight at that, because it also exists at night. So this light also exists in the practitioner's own mind. This is a practice to overcome sleepiness, see AN7.61 where this is explicitly stated. It's quite effective. (Useful for gloomy rainy days with power outages as well!)

Contextually in these two texts, I suppose even after you attained the jhanas you can still keep yourself awake for longer when practicing such perceptions, so you can practice contemplation for longer, which are the practices that follow in both AN6.29 and AN4.41. These practices do *not* include the divine eye in either sutta. Just like MN128, I see no single connection to the divine eye here, or even devas. There's only a connection to light, but that alone isn't enough to connect this to the divine eye.

The content of MN 127 and MN 128 is suspiciously related. Radiance, lights, seeing forms, deep meditation, Anuruddha

Not as suspiciously related as MN31, where it is specifically stated what the "comfortable abidings" are which the Buddha asks about in MN128. I don't see MN127 mentioning seeing forms, by the way. But that's a minor detail. Also in this case, just because the two texts both mention lights, doesn't mean it's the same thing.

Anuruddha being mentioned is also nothing special. Sorry, but it is clutching at straws a bit when a mere name is taken as an indication for what the sutta is about.

We'd better look at matching contexts. Now, in MN68 (Naḷakapāṇa Sutta) Anuruddha and friends had recently gone forth (like MN128 these friends include Kimbila, and also Bhagu reoccurs from MN128). And what does the Buddha teach them? How to develop the jhānas by abandoning the hindrances!! That's exactly what he's doing in MN128, **to the same people!**

That's the kind of context we should rely on, not MN127, where Anuruddha is the teacher, not the Buddha, and where the friends are also absent.

And in the Naḷakapāṇa Sutta the Buddha further says how he can see beings being reborn and why he tells the bhikkhus about it. So it's something that the bhikkhus (including Anuruddha) apparently weren't able to do, which implies Anuruddha (and his friends) didn't have the divine eye at that time yet. Which makes complete sense to me, since they didn't even have the jhanas yet at that time.

By the way, I found a much better indication that MN31 (Gosiṅga Sutta) happened chronologically after MN128: In it the three monks are said to be enlightened. In MN128 they still had hindrances, so they weren't enlightened yet.

In MN31 Anuruddha does mention (in passing, without a mention of light) talking to devas. But here he also did that *after* his (and his friends') enlightenment, and *after* developing the jhānas, not before.

But the divine eye isn't explicitly mentioned here either. And it's also quite clear that his friends didn't have this power, because, first of all, it isn't mentioned when the Buddha asks, "have you all achieved any other superhuman distinction?" Secondly, they had to learn from Anuruddha that he was speaking to the devas about their attainments. They apparently didn't see him doing it, and didn't do it themselves either. They didn't have such abilities; not after the jhānas, let alone before.

No other sutta I found says that the friends have these abilities either, so would they in MN128?

The commentary to MN 128 (as pointed out by another user here) says that it refers to the divine eye:

I pointed it out for the Vimuttimagga, but perhaps I confused it with the Papañcasūdanī. Regardless, it's my time to disagree with the commentaries! (Wouldn't be the first time, either, I already mentioned the kasinas earlier in this thread.)

I don't think the idea of nimittas as understood in later literature is wrong or contradicted by the suttas.

Cool. I didn't assume that you did, by the way.

Some people may develop it from the 4th jhāna (the ideal place in the suttas), but others seem to be able to use the light of the 'nimitta' to develop or naturally have the divine eye.

Are you basing that on MN128 alone, or are there other texts that point to this? As I said before, it doesn't seem the Buddha himself had the divine eye before he developed the jhānas, and the practice described in MN128 is that of the Buddha.

Also, even if Anuruddha had the ability before jhana (is this mentioned anywhere?), I highly doubt his friends had it before jhāna too, as I said before. There are no indications of that, and there are indications to the contrary.

By your interpretation it seems that the Buddha and the three monks of MN128 *all* had this ability before the jhanas. That seems kind of *odd* if the jhānas is the ideal starting place for such practices.



Focusing too much on the beings one is seeing (the forms)

But isn't focusing on the beings a good thing if you want to see those beings? I don't understand how that would be a hindrance to lose those forms and lose samādhī. What does it mean to focus too much?

Seeing ghosts or beings one has never seen before can be extremely frightening.

Fair enough, I should have thought of that myself! 🙏 Still, my basic point is that there is no other sutta where the divine eye is connected to the hindrances. It just seems far-fetched to connect the two.

I think we agree more than you may have thought, and I hope this post has clarified what I meant some more to demonstrate that.

Well, at least I understand a bit better what you're saying, so thanks for the patience to clarify. But still it makes no actual sense to me! I hope you understand. I think you're making connections that don't exist in actual practice, or in the suttas.

In a way I would have better understood if you argued MN128 was *only* about the divine eye, but to mix it up with the development of samādhī and nimittas, that is just really confusing to me.

Ceisiwr:

We all have biases Bhante.

Hey Ceisiwr,

I do apologize again for guessing! (I'll be more careful even in future when hypothesizing about such things.) What I said was meant as a general reflection, though. Because I'm sure there are people who dismiss the nimitta ideas based on MN128 with reasons much less well thought-out than yours.

I see you've responded also to an earlier part of the topic, which I appreciate. Pardon me if I let you have the last word! ❤️

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 175 July 5, 2023, 8:33pm

Sunyo:

Hey Ceisiwr,

I do apologize again for guessing! (I'll be more careful even in future when hypothesizing about such things.) What I said was meant as a general reflection, though. Because I'm sure there are people who dismiss the nimitta ideas based on [MN128](#) with reasons much less well thought-out than yours.

That's ok. For sure. As I say, and as evidenced from my post above, I'm not against nimittas. I do think they occur, I just don't think the suttas talk about them. Or rather, the arguments that they do aren't that strong to me. They don't have to be though. Buddhism is a living tradition, not a textual one. There are lots of things about meditation that aren't in the texts which have been transmitted down the line, and then written about later. Nimittas are talked about in all meditative traditions that I know of, Buddhist or non-Buddhist. If one has to be absorbed into them, and if some sense of physical experience remains whilst in the Jhānas is the main discussion for me.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 176 July 5, 2023, 8:35pm

Sunyo:

I see you're responded also to an earlier part of the topic, which I appreciate. Pardon me if I let you have the last word!

You're welcome Bhante. Because of work and things, I sometimes take a day or two to reply to people fully. Its nice we all had a productive discussion. All the best to you.

2 Likes

[Pondera](#) 177 July 5, 2023, 10:21pm

Sunyo:

Anyway, so you do think there are always these light/form nimittas inside the jhānas, then? Or how do you interpret [MN128](#)?

I'm glad you pointed out the distinction. Thank you [@DeadBuddha](#) as well.

I'm actually on your side here. I believe the nimitta is a precursor to absorption.

I also believe the nimitta and the sukha of absorption are one and the same.

I practice Brahmaviharas and in my experience I can, for example, cultivate Karuna. When I do this the characteristic of Karuna appears within my mental field. I extend it beyond my being into my entire mental field. This gives rise to a certain brown nimitta. The nimitta appears in the centre of my mind.

It's almost as if the process follows the sequence of:

Rapture —> Tranquility —> Sukha

The external projection of Karuna exists (for me) as rapture. The appearance of the brown nimitta in my *internal* perception acts like tranquility - ie. the longer it hangs around, the more relaxed my body grows.

And, for me, the centre of my mind is the nervous complex from which the rest of the body receives signals. Therefore, when the nimitta arises in the centre of my mind, I can, if I choose, let it "saturate" my body.

And that is how I understand how the arrival of the nimitta extends to the rest of the body. I find my body filled with this brown quality and it is extremely pleasant and satisfying. In fact, it's so pleasant it's sickening. And I turn away from it after a while.

I cultivate the four Brahmaviharas in order. Each Brahmavihara gives rise to a specific external mind frame (the counterpart sign), a specific nimitta (access concentration), and a specific absorption (absorption concentration).

1 Like

[Vaddha](#) 178 July 5, 2023, 10:44pm

Sunyo:

In a way I would have better understood if you argued [MN128](#) was *only* about the divine eye, but to mix it up with the development of samādhi and nimittas, that is just really confusing to me.

Hello, venerable! I — like you — am mostly just inspired to simply practice from these conversations. You make many good points, and I grant you a lot of what you say as valid and relevant to the practice / MN 128. Let me just (semi) briefly clarify my main point.

I think that in the suttas, or meditation in general, the radiance of the mind is used for developing the divine eye. So when the suttas talk about perceiving as though day a radiant mind which is alert and clear and leads to *ñānadassana* (also referenced in AN 8.64 as referring to the divine eye), I think this is talking about a practice which can culminate in seeing other beings / world systems.

I think that this is the *same* radiance one naturally experiences when the mind is free of drowsiness and sluggishness and settles into deeper meditation. It's just that one can play with this radiance and 'purify' / 'project' it in order to develop certain psychic abilities, especially the *dibbacakkhu*.

This is the relationship I'm making between *samādhi*, *nimittas*, and the *dibbacakkhu*. As one purifies the mind of hindrances more and more towards *samādhi*, one may perceive light/forms. These can cause various experiences to arise, from hindrances to more intense meditative experiences involving visions beyond oneself. I think MN 128 is about the *general* experience of this phenomena, and managing it to stabilize oneself in *jhāna*.

Keep in mind that one may have already developed *jhānas*, then started getting more experience with the divine eye, and then they were presented with obstacles arising once they had the divine eye that were blocking their progress. Actually, to give a concrete example (though not one I'd typically quote), in Mae Chee Kaew's biography I seem to remember one of her main issues in practice was getting lost in the divine eye and not settling into normal *samādhi*. At one point her teacher threatened to kick her out of the monastery if she didn't solve this problem; it was a major hindrance, apparently. So this is what I mean by the divine eye before *jhāna*: one with sufficient *samādhi* experience starts getting deeper and more profound experiences that become an obstacle.

It's very possible MN 128 is mostly *just* about internal *nimittas*. But I also strongly suspect the divine eye experience is related, as do the commentaries or Bhante Sujato for instance

[We perceived both light and a vision of forms](#)

"Forms" (*rūpā*) is similar in meaning here, although the plural suggests a diversity that is absent from plain old light. Perhaps it refers to a kind of psychic vision, perhaps of past lives or something of the sort.

So personally, I don't find it unlikely MN 128 is about Anuruddha and friends, who are already experienced practitioners, dealing with trippy meditative visions arising from the radiance of the mind they developed, and the Buddha understanding this. You make a good point about the progress of the Buddha's awakening, but I don't see it as a necessary contradiction: the Buddha developed *samādhi*, then he started developing the divine eye afterward which, as AN 8.64 eludes to, was actually a much more drawn out and involved process of investigation/experimentation. It could have been precisely in this period when the various hindrances or obstacles arose, as with Anuruddha.

Keep in mind that there are several suttas, such as DN 11, which mention that before Brahmā appears, one experiences a bright radiant light. This would imply that seeing other beings occurs in relation to the development of light and nimittas and can naturally happen to an experienced meditator.

Then that mendicant attained a state of immersion such that a path to the gods appeared. Then he approached the gods of the Four Great Kings ... [Divine eye/conversing with deities in AN 8.64]

‘But by the signs that are seen—light arising and radiance appearing—we know that Brahmā will appear. For this is the precursor for the appearance of Brahmā, namely light arising and radiance appearing.’ [More experience of divine eye after light and radiance]

DN 11

He paid attention, applied the mind, and concentrated wholeheartedly on the fate of Magadhan devotees, and sat on the seat spread out, thinking, “I shall know their destiny, where they are reborn in the next life.” And he saw where they had been reborn. ...

Then Venerable Ānanda went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Sir, you look so serene; your face seems to shine owing to the clarity of your faculties. Have you been abiding in a peaceful meditation today, sir?” [Reference to ‘peaceful meditation’ as meaning experiencing the divine eye in samādhi]

The Buddha then recounted what had happened since speaking to Ānanda, revealing that he had seen the destiny of the Magadhan devotees. ...

Then in the northern quarter a magnificent light arose and radiance appeared, surpassing the glory of the gods. Then Sakka, lord of gods, addressed the gods of the Thirty-Three, “As indicated by the signs—light arising and radiance appearing—Brahmā will appear. For this is the precursor for the appearance of Brahmā, namely light arising and radiance appearing.”

As indicated by the signs, Brahmā will appear.

For this is the sign of Brahmā: a light vast and great.

“We shall find out what has caused that light, and only when we have realized it shall we go to it.” [Reference to understanding the causality/basis for the arising of light in terms of the divine eye, as mentioned in MN 128.]

DN 18

(P.S., DN 18 has some other interesting references such as referring to the radiant vision of the god speaking as ‘nimitta’ — again a connection between this word, light, and the divine eye; it’s a really trippy sutta!)

As for perceiving light not being the ‘flashlight,’ this can be both: the forms (the deities) emitting radiant light (obhāsa), sure. But still I believe that the development of the divine eye is via extending the radiance of the mind outward to see other things. There’s even a correspondence

between one giving off light in a subtle body and one experiencing inner meditative light, as MN 127 describes with rebirth.

Before getting too trippy and clunky in describing profound meditative visions, I think I'll end off here. As far as practice goes and developing deeper samādhī/dealing with hindrances or upakilesas, we agree. And that's what matters most for Dhamma growth and discussion, more than secondary interpretative issues.

Much mettā and happy practice! 🙏 Strive on!
Vaddha

3 Likes

[kumara](#) 179 July 6, 2023, 12:52am

Brahmali:

kumara:

I do think they understand the character of *jhāna* as they understand it. That is why they regard it as optional.

Do you mean that they regard them as optional because they see them as difficult to attain? If so, it's a bad reason.

Of course not. They know what they call "jhāna" actually is, and know that's not necessary.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 180 July 6, 2023, 1:01am

Sunyo:

I've looked at your book [as you asked me to](#), Venerable, but I still don't understand what "separation from sensualities" pragmatically means to you. Can you explain? 😊 Sorry, but I find this very vague English. You can blame me for that, perhaps, since I'm not a native speaker.

But in more than a decade of using the language in daily speech I don't think I've never heard anybody use 'sensuality' in the plural in normal speech.

Whether you want to have it as plural or singular doesn't really matter here. The Pali isn't very particular about grammatical number for abstract nouns. E.g., in speaking of the 5 aggregates, sometimes the 4th aggregate is in plural and sometimes in singular.

2 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 181 July 6, 2023, 1:02am

This is masterly! Thanks for putting this together.

There is one small issue, however, that I wish to bring up. I think it is important, and fairly relevant to the issue raised by the OP.

Sunyo:

The title of the sutta itself is “minor (upa) defilements (kilesa)” (or Sujato “corruptions”). The defilements are the hindrances left before the jhānas, as described in many other suttas. (I'll give some below.) The *minor* defilements are the final hindrances before jhānas. As Ānālayo notes: “This list of mental obstructions [in [MN128](#)] does not mention the first two of the five hindrances, sensual desire and aversion. Their absence indicates that the meditative development described in the present discourse sets in at a more advanced stage, when these two comparatively gross mental defilements have been subdued and a minimum degree of mental tranquillity has already been established.” This is *exactly* when the nimittas happen: when the hindrances are weak. Sensual desire and anger are abandoned at that time. Good observation by Ven. Ānālayo.

I am not sure if this is such a good observation by the good Ven. Analayo. It is not clear to me that there is any real difference between the five hindrances and what is here called the *upakkilesas*. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, the word *upakkilesa* is sometimes used to mean defilements in general, not just minor defilements. At MN7 *upakkilesa* is used of a whole range of mental defilements, including some coarse ones, such as “unrighteous greed” (*visama lobha*). At MN14 *upakkilesa* is used of *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*, which are often regarded as the most general classification of defilements, whether refined or coarse.

It seems to me, then, that *upakkilesa* means defilement in general. In contemporary Buddhist circles the favoured word for defilement is *kilesa*, a word that hardly occurs in the *suttas*. The original *sutta* word for defilement in general is *upakkilesa* (and perhaps *saṅkilesa*), not *kilesa*. And so although *upakkilesa* can be rendered as “minor defilement” in connection with MN128, this does not work as a general rendering of the term, for which Bhante Sujato’s corruptions is better.

Second, I do not think there is any clear distinction between the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) and the defilements of MN128. As a matter of fact, the hindrances themselves are sometimes called *upakkilesas*, e.g. in the standard description of the gradual training (“having abandoned the five hindrances, the *upakkilesas* of the mind”, for instance at MN27). At AN5.23 each of the five hindrances is specifically said to be a *upakkilesa*. This is to be expected if *upakkilesa* is a general term for defilement.

Yet the interesting thing about the hindrances is that they are not just any kind of defilements. Their position on the path suggest that they are refined defilements, just as the *upakkilesas* of MN128. The hindrances are always abandoned after sense restraint, after full awareness, and after any other aspect of the gradual training that comes before *jhāna*. In fact they are the last thing you abandon before entering *jhāna*. This suggests to me that they are close in meaning to the *upakkilesas* of MN128.

Moreover, I do not think it is the case the first two hindrances are absent from MN128. Sometimes the senses, especially sounds, can intrude on the meditation, even at the stage of *nimittas*. I think this is potentially captured in MN128 by *upakkilesas* such inattention (*manasikāra*), discomfort (*duṭṭhulla*), and perhaps even longing (*abhijappā*). And wherever there is a remnant of sensory interest, ill will, in its weakest manifestation, is lurking in the background, perhaps as a weak kind of aversion.

My point is that I think the hindrances and the *upakkilesas* of MN128 are in fact quite closely related. And this has consequences for how one deals with defilements as a practical matter. The coarse defilements are dealt with through sense restraint and full awareness (*sati-sampajaññā*). These coarse defilements are mostly about sensuality and ill will. Defilements such as lethargy and restlessness, on the other hand, are hindrances that are mostly to be dealt with as one gets closer to *jhāna*. (I am not suggesting, of course, that lethargy and restlessness do not exist early on. I am just saying that one should focus on abandoning sensuality and ill will, which in turn will resolve much of the other defilements.) My conclusion is that the common practice of treating the five hindrances as a general classification of all defilements is problematic.

kumara:

They know what they call “jhāna” actually is, and know that’s not necessary

What exactly do you mean by this? A bit of elaboration would be helpful so that we don't speak past each other.

7 Likes

[kumara](#) 182 July 6, 2023, 1:42am

Brahmali:

kumara:

They know what they call “jhāna” actually is, and know that's not necessary

What exactly do you mean by this? A bit of elaboration would be helpful so that we don't speak past each other.

A bit much to explain here. I've written on that in my book

[What You Might Not Know about Jhāna & Samādhi](#). Just reading beginning of Part 1 is enough.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 183 July 6, 2023, 1:49am

Brahmali:

It seems to me, then, that *upakkilesa* means defilement in general. In contemporary Buddhist circles the favoured word for defilement is *kilesa*, a word that hardly occurs in the *suttas*. The original *sutta* word for defilement in general is *upakkilesa* (and perhaps *saṅkilesa*), not *kilesa*.

Yup, that's what I notice too. I suppose at that time *kilesa* meant something physical dirty.

1 Like

[Nickelii](#) 184 July 6, 2023, 2:18am

Sunyo:

But that's exactly how it's defined in [SN48.36](#)–39: “And what is the **faculty** of pleasure? Physical enjoyment, physical pleasure, the enjoyable, pleasant **feeling** that's born from physical contact.”

There also isn't a real difference between *nirodha* and *vaya*. I don't think this is the right place to discuss this, though. I believe Ven. Sujato addressed these ideas [here](#).

MN 128

Sunyo. SN 48.36 does not offer any explanation of the word 'indriya'. It is like asking: “What is the controlling faculty of the mind?” Answer: “Sukha”. The answer is unrelated to the meaning of 'indriya' in the question.

SN 22.5 looks like it explains what *samudaya* means and also its opposite *nirodha*.

As for MN 128, this sutta looks like its about psychic powers and not about jhana nimitta. It is obvious a jhana nimitta does not cause defilements to arise. MN 128 sounds like it is about Anuruddha & his companions, about which SN 14.15 says:

Do you see Anuruddha walking together with several mendicants?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All of those mendicants have clairvoyance (*dibbacakkhukā*).

In MN 128, the visions of forms Anuruddha is seeing, causing defilements to arise, are the forms seen with the Divine Eye. 🙄

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 185 July 6, 2023, 3:53am

Brahmali:

My point is that I think the hindrances and the *upakkilesas* of [MN128](#) are in fact quite closely related.

Thanks Ajahn, 🙏 I stand corrected on upakkilesa being “minor”, in fact I contradicted myself directly with the suttas I quoted right after, where it is used as a synonym for the five hindrances. And I actually realized it while I was typing it. 😊 But I was too lazy to edit, hoping nobody would notice! 😊 (But luckily someone did.) To be clear, that “minor” was my insertion, not Venerable Anālayo’s.

I also said to Erika that the fear is sometimes a disguised form of sensual desire or attachment to the five senses, so I agree on that part too.

However, I still think it may be relevant that sensual desire and anger are not mentioned *explicitly* in the list. In my experience, at that stage of meditation you’re generally not thinking about sensual things, or even other people. So many of the thoughts mentioned in MN19 for example are abandoned. I suppose contextually Anuruddha & co already did that by the way they lived and behaved. So also pragmatically I agree, with some defilements being abandoned by sense restraint and so forth.

Anyway, a minor detail, not relevant for the core of the arguments.

kumara:

Whether you want to have it as plural or singular doesn’t really matter here. The Pali isn’t very particular about grammatical number for abstract nouns. E.g., in speaking of the 5 aggregates, sometimes the 4th aggregate is in plural and sometimes in singular.

Thanks Venerable 🙏

But that doesn’t answer my (and Erika’s) question what it actually means to be “separated from sensuality/ies”.

Also, our whole disagreement kind of boils down to whether kāma in this case is an abstract noun or not. I don’t think you can just assume it like that.

(BTW. I don’t know if sankhāra *as an aggregate* is ever used in the singular, especially with the exact same sense. An example would be helpful. The other aggregates are in some contexts also used in the plural sometimes, but that doesn’t mean the number is simply irrelevant or turns it into an abstract noun. *One* feeling means something different from *multiple* feelings, for example.)

3 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 186 July 6, 2023, 4:50am

Erik_ODonnell:

I am also interested to learn about the pragmatic or phenomenological meaning of separation from sensuality when it is something else than the separation from the five senses.

Just to give some context, the disappearance of the five senses seems like such a clear experiential threshold. It must be very unambiguous whether the five senses are experienced or not; like night and day.

This is a very interesting post, Erik! Yes, I can only agree that the “hard” *jhāna* experience is pragmatically important, especially from an insight perspective. Insight is about the three characteristics, and *jhāna* gives you powerful direct experience of all three. Impermanence, for instance, as you point out, only becomes fully manifest when things disappear completely, that is, when they cease. This is so because you cannot possibly fully comprehend something while you are still immersed in it, like the tadpole in water. Only a frog, who has left the water, can have the perspective to understand it. It is for this reason that we find cessation as the highest expression of impermanence in *suttas* such as the *Ānāpānassati Sutta*, MN118.

When things cease, you also understand *dukkha* in a much deeper way, again because you have emerged from the thing that has ceased. When something is completely gone, you understand its true value, or lack thereof. And finally you get a deeper appreciation of *anattā*. By entering a meditative state where the things that have ceased are no longer accessible, such as the five senses in “hard” *jhāna*, you know they must be nonself. Anything that is outside of your control, that you cannot access, is by definition nonself.

So yes, “hard” *jhāna* (not sure if I like that term, though! 😊) is pragmatically a very important basis for insight in a way that pre-*jhāna samādhi* can never be. IMO.

However, there are even further pragmatic aspects that need to be properly discussed. So far as I am concerned, it is beyond doubt that people have experiences that match the description of hard *jhāna*. These are states of extreme otherworldly bliss, where there is no mental movement (with the partial exception of the first *jhāna*), where you have complete nondual unity of mind, where you are frozen for hours or even days on end. What are these states if not *jhāna*?

I mean, the *jhānas* are at the very end of the Buddhist path. They are almost always classified as a distinct category together with the four stages of awakening. They are praised throughout the *suttas* as exceptional. They are variously called the bliss of awakening, the footsteps of the Buddha, super-human qualities, distinctions in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, etc. We should expect the *jhānas* to be at the very peak of profound spiritual qualities. I don't know, but this seems to me to match so much better with “hard” *jhāna* than soft *jhāna*. And again, what are these states if not *jhāna*?

5 Likes

[thomaslaw](#) 187 July 6, 2023, 5:56am

However, according to SA 347 (but not in its counterpart SN 12.70), the four jhanas are *not* needed for attaining **the wisdom-liberated** 'paññā-vimuttā':

📄 [Pages 201-2 from The Fundamental Teachings of Early Buddhism Choong Mun-keat 2000.pdf](#) (167.3 KB)

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 188 July 6, 2023, 7:00am

Sunyo:

But that doesn't answer my (and Erika's) question what it actually means to be "separated from sensuality/ies".

For that, please refer to my book again, under the heading **Vivicca & Viveka**.

Sunyo:

I don't know if sankhāra as *an aggregate* is ever used in the singular, especially with the exact same sense. An example would be helpful.

Here you go:

Samkhārā bhikkhave, anattā, samkhārāñca idaṃ bhikkhave, attā abhavissa nayidaṃ samkhāraṃ ābādhāya samvatteyya, labbhettha ca samkhārā "evaṃ me samkhāraṃ hotu, evaṃ me samkhāraṃ mā ahoṣī'ti. Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave, samkhāraṃ anattā, tasmā samkhāraṃ ābādhāya samvattati. Na ca labbhati samkhāre "evaṃ me samkhāraṃ hotu, evaṃ me samkhāraṃ mā ahoṣī'ti.

It's in Anattalakkhana Sutta a.k.a. Pañcavaggiya Sutta.

FYI, your desire to win arguments is the reason I'm reluctant to engage with you.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 189 July 6, 2023, 7:03am

Erik_ODonnell:

I am also interested to learn about the pragmatic or phenomenological meaning of separation from sensuality when it is something else than the separation from the five senses.

Pls refer to the same as I suggested to [@Sunyo](#) above.

2 Likes

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 190 July 6, 2023, 8:28am

Brahmali:

So yes, “hard” *jhāna* (not sure if I like that term, though! 😊) is pragmatically a very important basis for insight in a way that pre-*jhāna samādhi* can never be. IMO.

I’m not sure about the hard/soft jhana as terms either, but AFAIK it’s the shortest to write so it saves the most typing time 😊

kumara:

Erik_ODonnell:

I am also interested to learn about the pragmatic or phenomenological meaning of separation from sensuality when it is something else than the separation from the five senses.

Pls refer to the same as I suggested to [@Sunyo](#) above.

Hi Venerable, congratulations on your book! it’s an accomplishment even if some people disagree with some of the points 😊

Here I’m quoting from the book:

In this way, sensualities and unskillful qualities can still occur while the observer feels separate from them, thus not dis-eased by them, making it easy to examine them objectively.

So if I have understood correctly, in the way (first) jhana is conceptualized in your book, the hindrances can be present during the first jhana but the meditator is experiencing a feeling of separation from them. (I'll just use 'the hindrances' as a blanket term here)

My first question is how this relates to right effort and right mindfulness. The EBTs are full of instructions not to tolerate arisen unskillful qualities. If the point of examining the hindrances objectively is to make them go away, isn't this just right effort rather than right samadhi?

Or, if this is a fourth satipatthana practice (i.e. understanding the hindrances) isn't this right mindfulness rather than right samadhi?

How would you respond to a criticism a la "yeah, if you do this and manage suppress the hindrances, *then* the vision of lights and form appear, which is the path into the first jhana"?

1 Like

[Sasha_A](#) 191 July 6, 2023, 8:48am

Erik_ODonnell:

I am also interested to learn about the pragmatic or phenomenological meaning of separation from sensuality when it is something else than the separation from the five senses.

There is an excellent book on the subject: [‘The Only Way To Jhāna’](#) by Ajahn Nyanamoli.

Ven. Nyanamoly:

If people were to truly see the danger of sensual desire for sensual pleasures, none of that would ever again be seen as safe, friendly, suitable, pleasurable for me; it would be seen to be like a pit of burning embers, a poisonous drink, a bait, a trap, etc. Those significances are there, it's not like you must remove the significances of pleasures. No, you must instead stop entertaining them, and look for the other significances that are equally present, but that you have been ignoring out of your habit of welcoming lust.

...

AN9.41

Then the thought occurred to me: “If, having seen the danger of sensual pleasures, I were to pursue that; and if, having understood the reward of renunciation, I were to develop it, there’s the possibility that my mind would leap up at renunciation, grow confident, steadfast, and firm, seeing it as peace.” So at a later time, having seen the danger of sensual pleasures, I pursued that theme; having understood the reward of renunciation, I familiarized myself with it. My mind leaped up at renunciation, grew confident, steadfast, and firm, seeing it as peace.

Then, withdrawn from sensual desires, withdrawn from unwholesome states, I entered and remained in the first comprehension: pleasure and happiness born from withdrawal, with thinking and pondering.

...

MN36

“In the same way, there are ascetics and brahmins who live withdrawn in body and mind from sensual pleasures. But they haven’t internally given up or stilled desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and passion for sensual pleasures. Regardless of whether or not they suffer painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to overexertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision, of supreme awakening.”

You’re not in the water any more, but the mind is still wet with the value of sensuality. So it doesn’t matter what you do, or how much effort you’re putting in, or how motionless and for how many hours you sit in your meditation, if you have not, on the level of your views, devalued sensuality forever. Through not understanding the danger of it—you are still within it. So there will be no wisdom arising on account of whatever endurance you undergo, because you do so while still acting from the point of view that sensual pleasures are valuable. ... Mentally abandoning sensuality is not simply about not thinking about it, it means devaluing it.

If you physically step outside of the swamp of sensuality, but still mentally value swimming in it, you’re not withdrawn from it. If you don’t see the danger in it, you are still valuing it.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 192 July 6, 2023, 8:56am

Erik_ODonnell:

So if I have understood correctly, in the way (first) jhana is conceptualized in your book, the hindrances can be present during the first jhana but the meditator is experiencing a feeling of separation from them. (I'll just use 'the hindrances' as a blanket term here)

Seems to me you didn't read that section properly.

Erik_ODonnell:

My first question is how this relates to right effort and right mindfulness. The EBTs are full of instructions not to tolerate arisen unskillful qualities. If the point of examining the hindrances objectively is to make them go away, isn't this just right effort rather than right samadhi?

Or, if this is a fourth satipatthana practice (i.e. understanding the hindrances) isn't this right mindfulness rather than right samadhi?

Are you regarding right effort, right mindfulness and right samadhi as separately practised?

Erik_ODonnell:

How would you respond to a criticism a la "yeah, if you do this and manage suppress the hindrances, *then* the vision of lights and form appear, which is the path into the first jhana"?

I would find it so confusing that I wouldn't be bothered.

1 Like

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 193 July 6, 2023, 9:33am

kumara:

Seems to me you didn't read that section properly.

Would you kindly point out my error?

kumara:

Are you regarding right effort, right mindfulness and right samadhi as separately practised?

I guess I regard them as causally linked, one leading to the other (e.g. the noble eightfold path, the gradual training, simile of the goldsmith).

kumara:

I would find it so confusing that I wouldn't be bothered.

Would you mind elaborating a bit about what is confusing about it? I really do want to try to understand your point of view 🙏

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 194 July 6, 2023, 9:46am

Erik_ODonnell:

I'm not sure about the hard/soft jhana as terms either, but AFAIK it's the shortest to write so it saves the most typing time 😊

I think "absorbed vs non-absorbed" is a better phrasing.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 195 July 6, 2023, 10:00am

Very interesting, thank you! Please, do you know if there is an English translation of this Agama? I would like to verify for myself that the Buddha explains that rupajhanas are not necessary. Thanks in advance.

[Sunyo](#) 196 July 6, 2023, 10:03am

Hi Bhante 🙏

What version of the Pali canon is that from? That looks to me like a wrong expansion of a *peyāla* (the “...” or “fill in the blanks”) by the transcriber, accidentally putting *saṅkhāra* in the singular.

This is what the Chattha Sangayana has as well as its [Mahasangiti](#) version used here on SuttaCentral:

Saññā anattā...pe... saṅkhārā anattā. **Saṅkhārā** ca idaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhavissaṃsu, nayidaṃ saṅkhārā ābādhāya saṃvatteyyuṃ, labbhettha ca saṅkhāresu – ‘evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu, evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesu’nti. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, saṅkhārā anattā, tasmā saṅkhārā ābādhāya saṃvattanti, na ca labbhati saṅkhāresu – ‘evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu, evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesu’nti.

And that’s how it’s [usually chanted](#) everywhere I know of, with *saṅkhārā* in the plural.

Anyway, we’re not here to discuss *saṅkhāra*! 😊 And I actually don’t disagree that there are abstract nouns in the canon. This is not a good example of this, though. But more on topic, I see no reason for *kāma* to be so. I think it’s very specifically in the plural because it refers to the five sense objects.

I noticed your reluctance, Bhante, to reply to me. But I’m not here to win an argument. My desire, if I have any desire about this, is, just like you, to teach people what the jhanas are about, what *samādhi* is about. If anything, I’d rather not have to have this discussion at all, actually! But since I think people are mistaken about some very important aspects of the path, and because I’m a Buddhist teacher, I point out what I think is mistaken. If at times it seems like I’m doing so rudely or just to “win”, that’s an artifact of the written medium.

Perhaps these things should be discussed in a live meeting instead, that’d be interesting. 😊

Anyway, meta discussion aside. I read that part of the book already. I actually disagree that there are still unskillful qualities in the jhānas, but let’s put that aside. Like Erika, I still don’t understand. It doesn’t explain to me what “secluded from sensualities” means. I suppose it’s clear to you, but not to me. And I *am* truly interested in what you have to say, not to win an argument but to understand where others are coming from.

I was hoping you could explain it briefly here instead of referring to your book. Anyway, if you don’t want to explain that’s fine. Then I just don’t understand. 😊 To me, though, *viviceva kāmehi* means something very specific, as you’ll know, being without experiences of the five senses. I can put that very briefly.

Much metta from down under!

1 Like

[thomaslaw](#) 197 July 6, 2023, 10:22am

DeadBuddha:

Very interesting, thank you! Please, do you know if there is an English translation of this Agama? I would like to verify for myself that the Buddha explains that rupajhanas are not necessary. Thanks in advance.

I think it is possibly no English translation of the sutra yet. But I could be wrong. The full text is shown here:

<https://suttacentral.net/sa347/lzh/taisho?reference=none&highlight=true>

1 Like

[kumara](#) 198 July 6, 2023, 10:25am

I've lost interest engaging with you.

[Sunyo](#) 199 July 6, 2023, 10:36am



Well, I get bored with myself at times as well, so I can understand! 🤔

[kumara](#) 200 July 6, 2023, 10:37am

Erik_ODonnell:

kumara:

Seems to me you didn't read that section properly.

Would you kindly point out my error?

Just search for “hindrance” in that section and you should find them. E.g.:

1. Although the **hindrances**—being grosser forms of unskillful qualities—are **abandoned**, at least temporarily, subtler ones such as own-self view (sakkāya·diṭṭhi), ego (māna), and some other fetters (saṃyojanas) must remain, unless they are already abandoned through awakening.

kumara:

Are you regarding right effort, right mindfulness and right samadhi as separately practised?

I guess I regard them as causally linked, one leading to the other (e.g. the noble eightfold path, the gradual training, simile of the goldsmith).

When you add a link to another, is the earlier linked dropped?

kumara:

I would find it so confusing that I wouldn't be bothered.

Would you mind elaborating a bit about what is confusing about it? I really do want to try to understand your point of view 🙏

I really can't elaborate about what is confusing about what I find confusing.

Anyway, perhaps you'd be enlightened by this: [The Nimitta of Jhāna](#)

1 Like

[Erik O'Donnell](#) 201 July 6, 2023, 12:29pm

kumara:

Just search for “hindrance” in that section and you should find them. E.g.:

I guess I don't understand the difference between sensualities, unskillful states and the hindrances then.

So is it that subtle hindrances can be present during first jhana then?

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 202 July 6, 2023, 7:22pm

Venerable, I found your post very well written. It has made me want to practice rupajhanas without the 5 senses even more!

Yes, I can only agree that the “hard” jhāna experience is pragmatically important, especially from an insight perspective. Insight is about the three characteristics, and jhāna gives you powerful direct experience of all three. Impermanence, for instance, as you point out, only becomes fully manifest when things disappear completely, that is, when they cease. This is so because you cannot possibly fully comprehend something while you are still immersed in it, like the tadpole in water. Only a frog, who has left the water, can have the perspective to understand it.

Personally, I don't feel that it's impossible to fully understand the 3 characteristics without being in a situation analogously similar to that of the frog out of the water (compared to the tadpole in the water), i.e. I don't think it's necessary to outright suppress our 5 senses to fully understand dukkha, anatta, and anicca.

The reason is the following syllogism.

Presupposition n°1 :

Human beings can also illusorily identify with their minds;

Presupposition n°2 :

rupajhana do not suppress the mind ;

Presupposition n°3 :

it seems that SN 12.70 implies that to attain liberation, it is not necessary to reach a meditative state that suppresses the mind, since this sutta says that to attain liberation, it is not necessary to reach the deep meditative states superior to the 4 rupajhanas ;

Presupposition n°4 :

Now, if liberation could only be attained by a person analogously similar to the frog out of water (without 5 senses), and if the reason for this is that as long as one is immersed in the 5 senses one is

not fully aware of the associated identifying illusion, then to attain liberation it would be necessary to suppress the mind through a deep meditative state (since an identifying illusion can be associated with the mind in which one is immersed);

Conclusion :

So personally, I'd find it hard to say that "full understanding of the 3 characteristics can only be obtained if we suppress the 5 senses by rupajhana analogously to the frog, because otherwise we're too immersed to notice the illusion".

These are states of extreme otherworldly bliss,

When things cease, you also understand dukkha in a much deeper way, again because you have emerged from the thing that has ceased. When something is completely gone, you understand it's true value, or lack thereof. And finally you get a deeper appreciation of anattā.

I mean, the jhānas are at the very end of the Buddhist path. They are almost always classified as a distinct category together with the four stages of awakening. They are praised throughout the suttas as exceptional. They are variously called the bliss of awakening, the footsteps of the Buddha, super-human qualities, distinctions in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, etc. We should expect the jhānas to be at the very peak of profound spiritual qualities.

I don't think this is the monopoly of senseless jhanas. I don't see why jhanas with senses couldn't be extremely pleasant, extremely powerful, extremely calm, and so radical that they would completely change our vision of our body, our mind, and the world. Maybe they wouldn't be as radical as senseless jhanas, I don't know. But I don't see why they wouldn't also be largely sufficient to take us a long way along the path; for example, if sense jhanas could bring about a total imbibition of pleasure in the physical body, this might imply that when the meditator comes out of jhana, he is much less attached to ordinary worldly pleasure. This is already a great step forward, I think. But in addition, if from the point of view of jhana with senses, we interpret AN 9.36 and MN 111 as instructions to practice vipassana while in jhanas completely imbibed with different qualities, then these jhāna with senses can also clearly be used to deepen our insight.

Here are a few impressions!

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 203 July 6, 2023, 9:41pm

Please, does anyone know if Bhikkhu Bodhi thinks rupajhanas are senseless?

[kumara](#) 204 July 7, 2023, 12:23am

Erik_ODonnell:

So is it that subtle hindrances can be present during first jhana then?

I didn't say anything about "subtle hindrances".

Do you meditate?

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 205 July 7, 2023, 1:43am

I know this was addressed to Venerable Brahmali, and I'm sure he has some wise things to say, but I hope you all don't mind me jumping in as well. 😊 (🙏 Ajahn)

DeadBuddha:

Now, if liberation could only be attained by a person analogously similar to the frog out of water (without 5 senses), and if the reason for this is that as long as one is immersed in the 5 senses one is not fully aware of the associated identifying illusion, then to attain liberation it would be necessary to suppress the mind through a deep meditative state (since an identifying illusion can be associated with the mind in which one is immersed);

Hi DB,

I say you're right with this presupposition. The mind *also* needs to stop to be able to understand that it suffering. But the easiest (and I think *only*) way to see how the mind can stop, is to have the five senses cease *first*, and being left only with the mind. Otherwise it's like trying to extinguish six fires at the same time, burning all around you.

Also, there is more to abandoning the five senses than just seeing that they are suffering. It also lets you understand how the *mind* is suffering. If one has never directly looked inside the mind (by which I mean experienced a jhana), one can't really know how it works, how it too depends on

contact (*phassa*). Because the mind too is created (*saṅkhata*) and produced—as are the jhanas—and the way to see this is not by focusing on the body, but by focusing on the mind, seeing for example how its awareness depends on its object. You can't do this (I think) if you have 6 types of contact going on at the same time.

But that's not really the main thing, even, because in this thread we've mainly been discussing one aspect of the jhānas—the absence of the five senses—but there is another thing: the absence of the unskillful qualities. And in my opinion, from what I've heard and read, the non-absorption jhāna underestimates these too. And that is actually the most dangerous part of misunderstanding samādhi. People may think they have abandoned the hindrances, but they are much more subtle than they might assume.

In MN128 we see some indication of this too. The Buddha tells Anuruddha & friends that his nimittas disappeared when he was a Bodhisattva, and only *then*, after the nimittas fell apart, he realized that there were still hindrances present. This is because the nimitta is a reflection of the mind. If it is dull, it means the mind is dull; if it is moving, it means the mind is moving; and so forth. It's like looking in a mirror. I don't see how you could really understand the hindrances without such experiences, without looking directly at a reflection of the mind, which is where the hindrances are hiding. The hindrances aren't hiding in the body, is what I'm saying.

And without abandoning the hindrances, it's impossible to see reality. For example, the sense of self (or "conceit") I would put under unskillful qualities. The sense of self disappears when attaining the jhanas. Inside of the jhanas you (temporarily) have the exact same mind the Buddha and all other enlightened ones had when they were in jhana. See in the suttas that when the Buddha describes his jhāna experiences as an enlightened being, he uses the *exact same words* as before his enlightenment. There's no difference in the description, because they *are* the exact same (temporarily). Now, with such a true self-less experience you can start to understand what enlightenment is about. 😊 (And it won't be what you think it is! That's the problem of delusion, it also deludes our ideas about awakening.) This is also why the jhanas I think are called the "sukha of awakening": even if you're not enlightened, if you experience them, it's like you're temporarily awakened. You experience the exact same happiness as the awakened ones in jhana.

That's why I care so much people have a proper idea of the jhanas. They're missing out otherwise!

However, actually, whenever these types of questions come up I like to remember people that they might be coming from an unhelpful mindset. Because our question shouldn't be, "how much suffering can I still experience before insight?" or "how shallow can my meditation be?", but instead "how much can I let go of?" Because the path is not really about the experience of jhana itself, it's about letting go.

So pragmatically also, just aim at letting go. Jhanas and deep insights come from the *exact* same mindset, namely that of letting go. Before jhana and before stream entry your mind does the same

thing, which is letting go of the self. But to enter jhana, you also let go of 5 senses; to become a stream enterer, you let go of all 6.

But trying to skip straight to letting go of all 6 senses at once, is like trying to lift 100kg before you can lift 20kg.



5 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 206 July 7, 2023, 5:45am

DeadBuddha:

Please, does anyone know if Bhikkhu Bodhi thinks rupajhanas are senseless?

He is an Abhidhammika so yes, but he also says that based on the suttas alone they sound more like the body is still experienced (and so non-absorbed Jhana). It's because of the Abhidhamma and commentaries then that he thinks they are absorbed.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 207 July 7, 2023, 6:03am

Brahmali:

This is a very interesting post, Erik! Yes, I can only agree that the “hard” *jhāna* experience is pragmatically important, especially from an insight perspective. Insight is about the three characteristics, and *jhāna* gives you powerful direct experience of all three. Impermanence, for

instance, as you point out, only becomes fully manifest when things disappear completely, that is, when they cease. This is so because you cannot possibly fully comprehend something while you are still immersed in it, like the tadpole in water. Only a frog, who has left the water, can have the perspective to understand it. It is for this reason that we find cessation as the highest expression of impermanence in *suttas* such as the Ānāpānassati Sutta, [MN118](#).

Do we need to actually shut off the senses to understand arising and ceasing? In the Jhanas I have in mind one sees the conditionality between body, feelings, mental states and dhammas and so can see arising and ceasing since the gross body becomes the subtle body of the rupa realm. One can see how the body is bound up with perception and mind, and so is empty, when it starts it take on the form of Brahama etc, by becoming a subtle body like in the Dhyana sutra I posted above

“the four elements of the Desire Realm spread fully all over the body, which is soft, harmonious, gentle, and joyful signs, and the mind leaves bad desire and unwholesome deed, then the samādhi of single-minded thought can cause one having joy and happiness.¹⁸³ Forms created in the Form Realm have the feature of bright light. Hence, the cultivator sees the wonderful and bright light emitting from the body internally and externally”

That said do we need to see things directly ceasing in order to understand arising and ceasing? I take the “seeing” here to be more in the sense of “I see your argument” rather than “directly seen”, although that can occur with it too.

2 Likes

[Mrunal](#) 208 July 7, 2023, 9:12am

Ok I don't know where u have read about that ...

But as we know piti and sukh are two jhana factor which are present in first jhana till the 3rd jhana ...and there presence remove pain ...

The truth is first pain vanish ...body becomes light and tranquility feeling generated then a person enters in jhana. .it's happens suddenly...

Sometimes u do not enter in jhana but pain just vanishes

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 209 July 7, 2023, 9:35am

Very interesting, Venerable!

You seem to be saying that to attain liberation, after suppressing the 5 senses, one must necessarily also suppress the mind.

Yet SN 12.70 says that to attain liberation, there's no need to reach meditative states higher than the 4 rupajhana.

How do you reconcile your point of view with this sutta?

Two other things you said particularly struck me: 1/ a mirror of the mind (such as nimitta) is needed to understand obstacles; 2/ during jhana, we temporarily experience awakening.

Here's what I have to say about 1/.

It's true that nimitta sounds very interesting. I'm not allowed to talk about my practice on this site, but in my practice (Pa-Auk), I did indeed experience some kind of mental creations that mentally reflected and replicated my breathing, even merged with it.

And it's true that the obstacles can be extremely subtle. But I don't know if that makes nimittas necessary. In any case, personally, I find it hard to see in the suttas.

I have the impression that with the Buddha, cultivating attention to our various types of perception is already a kind of scan of our mind, and therefore notably a scan for impurities, unsuitable, destabilizing states (i.e. notably an obstacle scanner). In the suttas, I don't get the impression that it's necessary to go through an intermediary such as a "mirror" (like nimitta).

So, according to my understanding of the suttas, I think that to understand the extreme subtlety of certain obstacles, you need to practice the 4 mindfulnesses a lot, and practice them regularly, because by developing and cultivating them, you'll develop the 7 factors of awakening, and by perfecting these factors, you'll understand the obstacles to liberation much better, and thus achieve liberation (that's what I understand from MN 118). This happens little by little, progressively. With perseverance, our mind's attention sharpens and better perceives the truth of phenomena, including extremely subtle obstacles.

Below, here's what I have to say about 2/.

Wow, jhāna is a temporary experience of Enlightenment?! Interestingly, this overturns the vision I have of jhana, because I thought that a non-awakened person in senseless jhana still subtly possesses the illusion of Self! Now that I think about it, it's true that I would have said that the senseless jhana of an awakened person is far superior to the senseless jhana of a non-awakened person, because the non-awakened person would by definition always subtly have dukkha in his jhana, unlike the awakened person. But you tell me something else; very interesting, thank you Bhante!!!

But I find it hard to understand how it is logically possible to experience (temporarily) Enlightenment, without being awakened. I feel like there's a logical incompatibility. Perhaps you mean that whoever attains jhana is necessarily temporarily awakened AND temporarily experiences enlightenment?

You are very inspiring Venerable, thank you again.

The photo is funny ahah!

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 210 July 7, 2023, 9:39am

Thank you very much for this valuable information. I was very curious to know, because psychologically, I give great authority to Venerable Bodhi. I also wanted to say that I often find your posts very interesting and skillfully raising important points, thank you!

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 211 July 7, 2023, 9:40am

Yes he is a great monk. You're welcome and thank you.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 212 July 7, 2023, 9:51am

Mrunal:

Ok I don't know where u have read about that ...

But as we know piti and sukha are two jhana factors which are present in first jhana till the 3rd jhana ...and their presence removes pain ...

The truth is first pain vanishes ...body becomes light and tranquility feeling generated then a person enters in jhana. It happens suddenly...

Sometimes u do not enter in jhana but pain just vanishes

I don't know who you are replying to, but thought I would reply. In Jhana there is no mental or physical pain, but pain can arise again during the 1st Jhana due to prolonged intentional thoughts (of contentment, loving-kindness etc).

1 Like

[Mrunal](#) 213 July 7, 2023, 9:57am

Ok venerable friend...

I thought once you enter in jahan ...till it ends there should be only those 5 khana factors...

If we experiencing pain ...that mean jhana is breaking...

Loving kindness based jhana is where you continuously apply thoughts...vitakka and vichara ...so it is 1st jhana ...

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 214 July 7, 2023, 12:50pm

DeadBuddha:

You seem to be saying that to attain liberation, after suppressing the 5 senses, one must necessarily also suppress the mind.

Yet [SN 12.70](#) says that to attain liberation, there's no need to reach meditative states higher than the 4 rupajhana.

How do you reconcile your point of view with this sutta?

I wouldn't call it "suppress", but I get the idea.

Well, what stream winners "experience" when they enter the path doesn't really fit into the samādhi structure. Just like enlightenment isn't a meditative state, stream entry also isn't a meditative state.

Stream winners know what nibbāna is (nibbāna in the sense of the cessation of existence, the cessation of the six senses):

"Friend, though I have clearly seen as it really is with correct wisdom, 'Nibbāna is the cessation of existence,' I am not an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed. Suppose, friend, there was a

well along a desert road, but it had neither a rope nor a bucket. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. He would look down into the well and the knowledge would occur to him, 'There is water,' but he would not be able to make bodily contact with it. So too, friend, though I have clearly seen as it really is with correct wisdom, 'Nibbāna is the cessation of existence,' I am not an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed." (SN12.68)

Now this "Nibbāna is the cessation of existence" is talking about the *permanent* cessation of existence, which includes the cessation of all 6 consciousnesses. Stream winners haven't reached that yet. But they have seen all consciousness cease *temporarily*. And they also know with absolute certainty that it will cease permanently one day soon (soon in the scope of saṃsāra). This is what the looking down in the well represents, seeing the cool water down below.

DeadBuddha:

But I don't know if that makes nimittas necessary. In any case, personally, I find it hard to see in the suttas.

Hmm, I tried to phrase it non-absolutely by saying "in my opinion", "I think", and "I don't see how", but I think something still got lost. I wasn't trying to say that the suttas indicate that nimittas are necessary, just that I personally don't see how non-absorption jhanas lead to abandoning the hindrances fully.

I said earlier that I don't have the power to know the minds of all beings. So whether *everybody* in the whole world in all of time needs nimittas (or jhanas) to become enlightened, I can not know with 100% certainty. I just gave my point of view on the matter. What I'm saying is, I fail to see how someone would really understand the hindrances by focusing on the body instead of the mind. And I explained how the abandonment of hindrances works in light of the non-body (or "absorption") jhanas, and in light of MN128.

I did so because people were discussing the different approaches to insight based on the different approaches to jhānas, to see which makes more sense to them. I wasn't trying to argue that the suttas say nimittas are absolutely necessary, just that I personally can't see how one would abandon the hindrances without looking at the mind directly.

However, I would like to add that the nimittas *were* apparently necessary for the bodhisattva in MN128, and they resulted in his awakening. That should give us something to think about! Is it wise to assume we may be able get by with less deep meditation than the Buddha? 😊 I for one don't think so.

Similar when people wonder whether the jhānas are necessary. Well, they were necessary for the Buddha! So I'm not going to assume I can do without, that I'm somehow more penetrative with

insight than the Buddha.

DeadBuddha:

Wow, jhāna is a temporary experience of Enlightenment?

Wait, no :). There's another miscommunication between us here. And that's my fault, because the difference is a single word. I said jhana is "LIKE you're temporarily awakened", not that it "IS temporary awakening". It's **impossible** to be temporarily awakened, because awakening is by definition permanent, since it is the permanent ending of the defilements.

I instead tried to say that the unenlightened mind in jhāna experiences the same thing as an enlightened mind in jhana. If you were able to take a picture of your mind in jhana and a picture of an arahants mind in jhana, you can't tell the difference between the two. But that doesn't make jhāna a type of awakening. I hope you get the difference now.

Think of it like this. You aren't always angry, I assume? 😊 So sometimes anger has disappeared for you. For the Buddha anger has disappeared too. So when it comes to anger, your mind is similar to the Buddha's at times. (Note: this analogy only goes so far.) The difference is, you still have the ability to become angry again; the Buddha doesn't. This is why the suttas speak of "underlying tendencies". You may not always be angry, but you still have a *tendency* to become angry. The Buddha doesn't have such tendencies anymore. And just because you have a tendency to be angry, doesn't mean you are always angry.

Now, when it comes to the jhanas, add to anger also the other unskillful states of mind, including the sense of self. For the Buddha they are gone forever; for the unenlightened one in jhāna they are gone only temporarily. That doesn't make jhana a "temporary awakening". It's just a temporary absence of defilements. The tendency for self-identification is still not destroyed, but self-identification has disappeared temporarily. 😊

It takes insight to break these defilements permanently, to let go of self view permanently. Some people may attain jhānas and don't learn much from those experience, they don't become stream winners. They may even think they are enlightened already, or that they experienced nibbāna! However, if you're wiser than that, you will contemplate those jhāna experiences after you come out and realize what major defilement was absent but which is now present again. And that is "you": the sense of self.

To attain jhanas "you" have to cease, and it's the same for awakening. That's why it's impossible to conceive of what these things are like from a sense of self.

The Buddha has spoken of not identifying even with the attainment of the first absorption. For whatever they imagine it is, it turns out to be something else. (MN113)

😊 Brilliant, I love suttas. 😎

DeadBuddha:

the non-awakened person would by definition always subtly have dukkha in his jhana, unlike the awakened person.

The jhanas are still dukkha after enlightenment as well. That's because the only real happiness is the cessation of existence, all else is suffering in comparison. In AN9.34 that I linked earlier they are said to be "afflictions" compared to the absence of all consciousness, "when nothing is felt (or 'experienced')."

DeadBuddha:

You are very inspiring Venerable, thank you again.

I'm happy you say that, because it means some of the immense inspiration and joy I feel around this topic somehow finds its way to you even through text. That's all thanks to the Buddha, I'm just the messenger, lol. 🙏

And it's that inspiration is what made me stuck around here for longer than I wanted. 😊 So I'm leaving now! 😊 Thank you and all others for the nice discussion. I enjoyed it. Maybe there will be other opportunities in the future.

Sukhi hotu, nibbana-paccayo hotu. 🍀

(May you all be happy, may this [your contribution in this discussion] be for the attainment of nibbāna.)

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 215 July 7, 2023, 5:23pm

Thank you very much Venerable.

May all beings quickly realize the Causeless.

1 Like

[Pondera](#) 216 July 8, 2023, 7:47am

Sunyo:

It's **impossible** to be temporarily awakened, because awakening is by definition permanent, since it is the permanent ending of the defilements.

I think there's a quote where the Buddha compares awakening to an amputated man, and asks if the man is aware that his hands are amputated all of the time, or only when he refers to his "stubs". The answer, of course, is that he's amputated "all the time" but doesn't realize it on any given occasion unless he looks down at his "stubs". 😊

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 217 July 8, 2023, 8:24pm

Erik_ODonnell:

Just to give some context, the disappearance of the five senses seems like such a clear experiential threshold. It must be very unambiguous whether the five senses are experienced or not; like night and day.

Epistemologically, it also seems logical to me how "hard" jhanas gives insight into Dhamma: it seems like the hard jhana itself would be a direct experience of the five senses being causally dependent on the five hindrances. Like, experientially, the 5-sense-world (kamaloka) feels stable and persistent, but after a hard jhana I would guess that it could feel fickle and unreliable instead. Aka a direct experience of impermanence.

Moreover, logically, if the inventory of experience can be seen to vanish and reappear based on causes, I can see how this would challenge beliefs about a permanent self/essence within the five khandas.

So, it is relatively easy for me to imagine how "hard" jhanas could work within the EBT Dhamma-system to produce awakening outcomes like no longer holding self views.

With "soft" jhanas, it is harder for me to imagine experiential criteria for when they obtain. I also struggle to understand how they produce awakening outcomes.

Like, how can you tell when you're in a soft jhana? How do they produce awakening outcomes?

The way I see it when one enters a non-absorbed Jhāna, of the kind I have in mind, then, if there is wisdom, there is insight into

- The drawbacks of sensual pleasures, since there is a rapture and ease more refined apart from them.
- Impermanence of the aggregates, by seeing how the refined state & its mental components and the refined subtle body is dependent upon intentions.
- The emptiness of dhammas, since these states stand in relation to each other due to differing conditions. The old coarse body falls away and a new subtle body emerges, being completely bound up with one's mind and perception.

2 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 218 July 9, 2023, 12:51am

Erik_ODonnell:

I'm not sure about the hard/soft jhana as terms either, but AFAIK it's the shortest to write so it saves the most typing time 😊

That's definitely a good reason. 😊

DeadBuddha:

It has made me want to practice rupajhanas without the 5 senses even more!

Yay!

DeadBuddha:

Conclusion :

So personally, I'd find it hard to say that "full understanding of the 3 characteristics can only be obtained if we suppress the 5 senses by rupajhana analogously to the frog, because otherwise we're too immersed to notice the illusion".

This is a good point! It is still the case, however, that getting completely out of something is a more direct way of getting insight into it. We need to distinguish between what is possible and what is likely to be the most effective.

DeadBuddha:

I don't see why jhanas with senses couldn't be extremely pleasant, extremely powerful, extremely calm, and so radical that they would completely change our vision of our body, our mind, and the world.

Sense impressions are always moving and changing. They are never still for long. This means that true stillness can only be achieved by abandoning the senses. You will notice this in your meditation. The joy and the stillness is proportional to the degree to which you have given up the senses.

Sunyo:

But to enter jhana, you also let go of 5 senses; to become a stream enterer, you let go of all 6.

This is an important point. The path is gradual and so *jhāna* naturally comes before stream-entry. In other words, you abandon the five senses before you abandon all six. (Streamentry is abandoning the mind because you see it as *dukkha*. You give up craving for it, at least temporarily.)

Ceisiwr:

Do we need to actually shut off the senses to understand arising and ceasing?

It is extremely helpful!

Ceisiwr:

the sense of "I see your argument" rather than "directly seen"

To fully see the argument you need direct insight.

6 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 219 July 9, 2023, 2:05am

Brahmali:

This is an important point. The path is gradual and so *jhāna* naturally comes before stream-entry. In other words, you abandon the five senses before you abandon all six. (Streamentry is

abandoning the mind because you see it as *dukkha*. You give up craving for it, at least temporarily.)

 Ajahn

Not to argue or discuss more (I'm departing 😊), but just to clarify, since it seems perhaps I was misunderstood: I meant all six senses are let go (or abandoned) by the stream winner in the same sense that the five senses are abandoned in jhāna, i.e. they momentarily stop functioning as a result of letting them go. That is the way to understand all suffering, because it's seeing the opposite of suffering, nibbāna (the water in the well). And the only way to see impermanence of things is to have them cease.

And it's also the way to understand non self even more deeply than the abandoning of identification in the jhānas:

If someone said the mind is one's self, then that is not tenable. The arising and vanishing of the mind is seen, and from that it follows that one's self would arise and vanish. So it is not tenable to say that the mind is one's self. And so the mind is without a self. (MN 148)

I mean, people may disagree with this, but just to make sure my position was clear to everybody.

2 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 220 July 9, 2023, 2:14am

Well, now I need to quote you:

I'm not sure how we even got here. 😊 I think we all agree, lol.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 221 July 9, 2023, 9:26am

Brahmali:

true stillness can only be achieved by abandoning the senses

If that is true, then the Buddha didn't have true stillness when he's walking.

4 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 222 July 9, 2023, 12:02pm

Does stillness of the mind mean frozen and locked into place on one thing, or does it mean a mind which isn't reacting to sense experience with lust, aversion etc? There are two different views of this being presented here. It seems to me that in the 1st Jhana there is stillness because the mind isn't chasing sensual pleasures nor becoming adverse, due to the strength of mindfulness and effort in repelling the hindrances. There isn't complete composure however due to V&V as they are disturbing the mind now. When that is stilled, there is a more refined composure of the mind. Then rapture is a disturbance, and so on.

How could it possibly be otherwise, Aggivessana? Prince Jayasena dwells in the midst of sensual pleasures, enjoying them, consumed by thoughts of them, burning with fever for them, and eagerly seeking more. It's simply impossible for him to know or see or realize what can only be known, seen, and realized by renunciation...

They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then they meditate observing an aspect of the body—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world.

They meditate observing an aspect of feelings ... mind ... principles—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world. It's like when the elephant trainer dug a large post into the earth and tethered the elephant to it by the neck, so as to subdue its wild behaviors, its wild memories and thoughts, and its wild stress, weariness, and fever, and to make it happy to be within a village, and instill behaviors congenial to humans. In the same way, a noble disciple has these four kinds of mindfulness meditation as tethers for the mind so as to subdue behaviors of the lay life, memories and thoughts of the lay life, the stress, weariness, and fever of the lay life, to discover the system, and to realize extinguishment.

MN 125

"First, take someone who lives mixed up with sensual pleasures and unskillful qualities. After some time they hear the teaching of the noble ones, rationally apply the mind to how it applies to them, and practice accordingly. They live aloof from sensual pleasures and unskillful qualities. That gives rise to pleasure, and more than pleasure, happiness, like the joy that's born from gladness. This is the first opportunity for achieving happiness."

DN 18

3 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 223 July 9, 2023, 4:26pm

For example here we have a stillness of the mind whilst being physically assaulted

“Now, if others attack that bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired, and disagreeable, by contact with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, he understands thus: ‘This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it. But this has been said by the Blessed One in his “advice on the simile of the saw”: “Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching.” So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established, my body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail this body; for this teaching of the Buddhas is being practised by me.’ - MN 28

4 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 224 July 10, 2023, 1:19am

kumara:

If that is true, then the Buddha didn't have true stillness when he's walking.

Stillness comes in degrees. Yet *full* stillness is a non-dual state, called *ekatta* and *ekodibhava* in the *suttas*. This is achieved in the second *jhāna*. Full stillness is not compatible with walking.

4 Likes

[Joe.C](#) 225 July 10, 2023, 2:12am

Brahmali:

Full stillness is not compatible with walking.

Well, then this statement is in conflict with this sutta AN 3.63.

“Then, brahmin, **when I am in such a state**, if I walk back and forth, on that occasion my walking back and forth is celestial.

Buddha clearly say he also walk in Jhana state. The walk is celestial. He didn't say he got to exit the jhana first to walk.

2 Likes

[stephen](#) 226 July 10, 2023, 2:58am

Perhaps this depends on how one reads

“ evambhūto caṅkamāmi, dibbo me eso tasmim samaye caṅkamo hoti“

The Buddha is comparing the state of the mind in jhāna “divine”, to material luxuries.

The ‘divine going about’ should be taken metaphorically.

1 Like

[Pondera](#) 227 July 10, 2023, 4:50am

Joe.C:

Buddha clearly say he also walk in Jhana state. The walk is celestial. He didn't say he got to exit the jhana first to walk.

He could also be in one of the Brahmaviharas.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 228 July 10, 2023, 5:37am

Joe.C:

Well, then this statement is in conflict with this sutta [AN 3.63](#).

I wouldn't take that sutta as proof of that. There are questions about the grammar. It's also somewhat suspect since it says you can walk whilst in the 4th Jhana, but in that attainment breathing has either ceased or is too subtle to detect. Hard to believe that can occur whilst walking around the place.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 229 July 10, 2023, 5:51am

Brahmali:

Stillness comes in degrees. Yet *full* stillness is a non-dual state, called *ekatta* and *ekodibhava* in the *suttas*. This is achieved in the second *jhāna*. Full stillness is not compatible with walking.

Why do you think *ekatta* and *ekodibhava* means “non-dual” Bhante? In my mind they mean something more like “composure”.

3 Likes

[kumara](#) 230 July 10, 2023, 7:11am

Ceisiwr:

Hard to believe that can occur whilst walking around the place.

Belief isn't proof either.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 231 July 10, 2023, 7:13am

stephen:

Perhaps this depends on how one reads

“ evambhūto caṅkamāmi, dibbo me eso tasmim samaye caṅkamo hoti“

The Buddha is comparing the state of the mind in jhāna “divine”, to material luxuries.

The ‘divine going about’ should be taken metaphorically.

If you read the whole sutta, it should become clear to you what the Buddha meant.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 232 July 10, 2023, 8:42am

Joe.C:

Buddha clearly say he also walk in Jhana state. The walk is celestial. He didn't say he got to exit the jhana first to walk.

Clear in that translation, perhaps, but the word “state” isn't in the Pāli. This was already addressed [earlier in this thread \(click\)](#).

Summary:

1. In the same sutta the Buddha actually says he sits down before he enters jhana.
2. It doesn't mean “in that state”, but “while I'm practicing like that”, meaning in general he attains the jhanas, or “when I had been like that”, meaning he has attained the jhanas but doesn't have to be in them any longer.

Two days ago Ajahn Brahmali also explained how to read such suttas:

(Already broke my intention to not come back... I should just stop reading this thread, otherwise I'll keep replying forever. 😊 Anyway, we're going in circles now, with this sutta about walking in jhāna...)

4 Likes

[stephen](#) 233 July 10, 2023, 9:04am

I think a literal and simple way to translate
 “evambhūto” is something like ‘thus -been’,
 the sense of “when I practice jhāna’.

It doesn’t necessarily have the sense of ‘while meditating in jhāna’.

In a very prosaic way it seems analogous to saying, ‘when I exercise regularly I feel like a million bucks. ‘. I don’t only feel that way when actually at the gym....

2 Likes

[Jasudho](#) 234 July 10, 2023, 1:11pm

Joe.C:

“Then, brahmin, **when I am in such a state**, if I walk back and forth, on that occasion my walking back and forth is celestial.

It depends on the translation. Here is Ven. Sujato’s:

"With the giving up of pleasure and pain, and the ending of former happiness and sadness, I enter and remain in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness. **When I’m practicing like this**, if I walk, at that time my walking is heavenly. "

Does anyone believe that people can walk in the 4th jhana?

Breathing stops in the 4th jhana - can there be walking without breathing?

It seems clear by inference that the walking comes later, after emerging from the 4th jhana.

“When I’m practicing like this” makes more sense if it’s taken in a general way, such as, When I’m practicing the jhanas, entering and leaving them, my walking (when not in jhana) is heavenly.

Also you may wish to view these videos by Venerables Brahmali and Sunyo. In the second one, Ven. Sunyo directly addresses this issue.



[Right Knowledge and Right Liberation Workshop | 2023 | Buddhist Society of...](#)

The BSWA is delighted to present yet another workshop in the series on Early Buddhism. We will continue where we left off with the last workshop, which com

All best 🙏

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 235 July 10, 2023, 3:39pm

This post was flagged by the community and is temporarily hidden.

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 236 July 10, 2023, 3:58pm

Joe.C:

Translation is just a bias of someone.

Well sure. But some translations are more accurate in terms of what is expressed in teachings than others.

Also, the Buddha said some of his teachings were categorical and direct and others required one to draw out the meaning, so to speak. Sorry, can't recall the sutta citation right now.

In either case, your response didn't address the main point regarding the 4th jhana and walking. The Venerables explained this well in the posted video.



2 Likes

[Raftafarian](#) 237 July 10, 2023, 4:09pm

Brahmali:

Stillness comes in degrees. Yet *full* stillness is a non-dual state, called *ekatta* and *ekodibhava* in the *suttas*. This is achieved in the second *jhāna*.

I take it that this non-dual state is the state described to Bahiya in Ud 1.10, a non-duality where there is no subject-object dualism?

“And since for you, Bāhiya, in what is seen there will be only what is seen, in what is heard there will be only what is heard, in what is sensed there will be only what is sensed, in what is cognized there will be only what is cognized, therefore, Bāhiya, **you will not be with that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be with that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be in that; and since, Bāhiya, you will not be in that, therefore, Bāhiya, you will not be here or hereafter or in between the two**—just this is the end of suffering.”

MN54 says it differently, but it is essentially the same.

Having truly seen this with right understanding, **they reject equanimity based on diversity and develop only the equanimity based on unity, where all kinds of grasping to the world’s material delights cease without anything left over.**

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 239 July 11, 2023, 12:57am

Jasudho:

Does anyone believe that people can walk in the 4th jhana?

Breathing stops in the 4th jhana - can there be walking without breathing?

It seems clear by inference that the walking comes later, after emerging from the 4th jhana.

That only seems clear to you because of your belief.

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 240 July 11, 2023, 1:07am

This post was flagged by the community and is temporarily hidden.

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 241 July 11, 2023, 1:41am

So you know that people can walk while not breathing?

Folks can have different views and understandings about this.

Beyond that, I refer you to the videos in an earlier post. The discussion of this issue by Ajahn Brahmali and Bhiikkhu Sunyo is helpful.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 242 July 11, 2023, 1:46am

Jasudho:

So you know that people can walk while not breathing?

Not by anybody or anytime, but when engaging in 4th jhana, yes, just as mentioned in the Suttas.

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 243 July 11, 2023, 2:02am

As mentioned in the videos by Venerables Brahmali and Sunyo, have you considered the locative absolute in the Pāli and what this indicates with respect to the jhanas and walking?

In either case, I'm not sure we'll clarify this particular issue any further.

I've enjoyed the exchanges, so thank you.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 244 July 11, 2023, 9:40am

kumara:

I don't want to answer your question here, but I'm sure you'll find the answer in this book:

[What You Might Not Know about Jhāna & Samādhi](#)

I just realized that I had given an old link. The final version is not a PDF but an ePub file and a hard copy: [How to get “What You Might Not Know about Jhāna & Samādhi” by Kumāra Bhikkhu - JustPaste.it](#)

Nonetheless, there's very little difference between the two.

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 245 July 12, 2023, 11:08pm

Joe.C:

Well, then this statement is in conflict with this sutta [AN 3.63](#).

The current translation by Bhante [@Sujato](#) , which is more to the point is as follows:

When I'm practicing like this, if I walk, at that time my walking is heavenly.

In other words, it is not about what happens during *jhāna*, but about what happens during the general time one is involved with such practices. This is even clearer at MN122 where one is said to speak when practicing like that i.e. the four *jhāna* and more. I don't think anyone would say you can speak while in the fourth *jhāna*, or even think for that matter.

Ceisiwr:

Why do you think *ekatta* and *ekodibhava* means “non-dual” Bhante? In my mind they mean something more like “composure”.

The most direct translation of *ekatta* is “oneness”, which to me suggests non-duality. This is pretty much what you find in all dictionaries. Further, in the *suttas* it is used in contrast with *nānatta*, “manifoldness”. In the broader Indian tradition, *samādhi* itself is used about non-dual states. I cannot see any reason why the Buddha would use the word in a different way.

Raftafarian:

I take it that this non-dual state is the state described to Bahiya in [Ud 1.10](#), a non-duality where there is no subject-object dualism?

No this is different. This is about insight into nonself.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 246 July 13, 2023, 3:14am

This post was flagged by the community and is temporarily hidden.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 247 July 13, 2023, 5:31am

To me, “true stillness” or “full stillness” (none of those are my inventions) is when one is unaffected by sense objects because one has insight into their true nature. Form is just form, etc.

As such, I deem arahants to have true stillness, whether they are walking, sitting, standing or lying down. When one has to depend on being cut off from sense objects to have stillness, it’s not so “true”, isn’t it?

2 Likes

[josephzizys](#) 248 July 13, 2023, 6:14am

Brahmali:

Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses.

Im not quite sure that can be right.

If awakened monastics, completely free from attachment to sensual desire where also completely free from sensation and perception then when they went on almsround they would bump into the walls.

This wouldn't be so bad for them, as since they are free they wouldn't suffer, but it would look hilarious and it also makes no sense.

The idea that somehow jhana makes you go blind and deaf and so on is simply nonsensical, and a picture of metaphysics that allows a whole bunch of mind-perceptions without recourse to body-sensations is simply not compatible with the philosophical position of the ebts.

"Where there are no feelings (sensations, perceptions) at all, could one point to anything at all and say "i am that"? No!" (My paraphrase.)

So one cannot be in jhana without some perceptual ground.

In first jhana one perceives (feels, has the sensation of) thought, pleasure and happiness

In second jhana one has a subtle but true perception/sensation/feeling of the absence of thought and the presence of pleasure and happiness.

In third jhana one has the subtle but true perception/sensation/feeling/experience of the absence of emotional happiness and the presence of physical pleasure.

With the ceasing of pleasure one is said to be in 4th jhana.

NOTHING in the original pericope or as far as i can tell in the ebts more generally would lead one to believe in:

Any form of mind body dualism.

Any notion of experiences sans perceivables on which they are conditional.

And frankly any reason to believe that even in fourth jhana that the subjective perception is absent, after all in the original pericope it is precisely from 4th jhana that

One fashions a mind made body

One flies around like a superman

One observes the arising and passing of beings

One recalls one's past lives

How could any of that occur if you couldn't see hear touch taste smell anything?

Ridiculous.

3 Likes

[Erik O'Donnell](#) 249 July 13, 2023, 9:55am

kumara:

Brahmali:

The current translation by Bhante [@Sujato](#) , which is more to the point is as follows:

When I'm practicing like this, if I walk, at that time my walking is heavenly.

"When I'm practicing like this" is a very poor translation for *evambhūto*, probably deliberately done so to make the sutta appear to agree with his views.

Venerable, this type of speech is not very inspiring. Please remember that you are posting on a public forum that anyone can read.

4 Likes

[kumara](#) 250 July 13, 2023, 10:08am

Erik_ODonnell:

kumara:

"When I'm practicing like this" is a very poor translation for *evambhūto*, probably deliberately done so to make the sutta appear to agree with his views.

Venerable, this type of speech is not very inspiring. Please remember that you are posting on a public forum that anyone can read.

I understand why you find what I said above to be offensive. Actually, I'm merely speaking my mind.

Yes, I understand this is a public forum, and do intend the above to be read by the public.

1 Like

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 251 July 13, 2023, 10:12am

kumara:

I understand why you find what I said above to be offensive. Actually, I'm merely speaking my mind.

It's not that I find it offensive. Rather, speaking only for myself as a lay follower, I'm saying I expect a higher standard of conduct from monastics such as yourself.

In any case, be well 🙏

Edit:

I do think it's an unfair accusation though. Ven. Sujato regularly posts about his translation choices, explains his philosophy, etc. right here on D&D. Making Ven. Sujato probably the most transparent translator of the EBTs to date.

3 Likes

[keller](#) 252 July 13, 2023, 10:39am

josephzizys:

in the original pericope it is precisely from 4th jhana that

One fashions a mind made body

One flies around like a superman

One observes the arising and passing of beings

One recalls ones past lives

How could any of that occur if you couldnt see hear touch taste smell anything?

Ridiculous.

There is more than two millenia of exegetical momentum behind this fundamentally *yogic* interpretation of samādhi as an exercise in self-hypnotism leading to a trance state of total external perceptual black-out and non-dual experiential “melting” into the absolutely unified fullness of a singular mental image, so the amount of effort being put into rationalization and interpretive gymnastics within this thread and in “nostril-focusing” schools of thought everywhere is not surprising.

But within a EBT context the pericope of monks attaining and weilding iddhi directly from the fourth jhāna is a slam-dunk argument against such conceptions of the jhānas, even if we think of the powers as purely mental operations. Such operations, being composed of imagery other than the singular nimitta of hypnotic focus, would necessarily require a fall from pseudo-perceptual trance-unity. Of course the same strategy of rationalization could be applied here, claiming that iddhi can be weilded immediately after such a fall but not during the fourth jhāna proper, but then we can always make words mean whatever we want them to mean with enough motivation and effort, especially with such slippery topics as meditation, the general landscape of the psyche, and frickin' psychic powers.

Thank you for pointing out this hole in the self-hypnotists' scriptural support; I had never thought of it before.

2 Likes

[josephzizys](#) 253 July 13, 2023, 11:29am

keller:

nostril-focusing

I'm pretty clearly of the opinion that sati, including anapana is an S phenomena and that jhana is the original meditation pericope.

The pericope claims it is possible to fashion a mind made body that can fly and see and think and everything.

All one need do is

Find a secluded spot, away from people.

Sit comfortably.

And bring the mind to that very spot.

Allow drowsiness, anxiety, and past grievances to fade away, and thinking true pure thoughts, experience the joy and pleasure there.

Allowing thoughts to come to rest, experience the joy and pleasure there.

Allowing joy to come to rest, experience the pure pleasure, thoughtless, emotionless pleasure, and

Allowing that to come to rest experience a mind empty of doubt, drowsiness, anxiety, thought, (even good thoughts) emotion, and perfectly balanced.

Now! From there all you gotta do is fashion your mind made body and fly around! Easy!! 😊

All the nimitta stuff and thousands of years of exegesis is material looking back at the pericope from much futhur away than even S, and S clearly records the loss of jhana as an accessible practice to the community.

While it is possible that the exegetical tradition emanates from knowlegable sources in the practice it is also possible that even before the end of the presectarian period the literate community had lost access to the original practice.

At any rate I really dont have access to most of that material so I have no way of really knowing what it says except by hearsay or a sudden career change.

All i am saying is that the pericope makes several pretty specific claims involving what is and isnt happening in jhana and its subsequent development into enlightenment and one of those claims involves a mind made body that can see hear touch smell taste so it is definitely not the case that in any sensible sense can it be said that the 4th Jhana is a state without seeing hearing touching smelling tasting.

AT NO POINT In the pericope does it ever say a single thing about a bright light, about breathing, about blacking out, about anything like any of that stuff from S or the rest.

Obviously however there is a pretty wide range of options left open between what the state lacks and what it requires.

So self hypnosis and non dual melty states are all well and good, but unless you are somewhere where you can have what i suppose the world would write off as a “controlled hallucination” of an astral body that can fly and see ghosts then you probably arnt doing it right.

1 Like

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 254 July 13, 2023, 11:47am

josephzizys:

If awakened monastics, completely free from attachment to sensual desire where also completely free from sensation and perception then when they went on almsround they would bump into the walls.

It is only while in the jhana state that sensual perceptions are gone (it's part of what defines the first jhana state in the first place).

I find it hard to believe you're not aware of this, tbh 🤔

josephzizys:

The idea that somehow jhana makes you go blind and deaf and so on is simply nonsensical, and a picture of metaphysics that allows a whole bunch of mind-perceptions without recourse to body-sensations is simply not compatible with the philosophical position of the ebt.

What do you make of people who say they experience such states? Are they lying or confused or something else?

And remember that, what is possible in practice must be possible in theory. But that something is not possible in theory doesn't mean it's not possible in practice (theory can be wrong) 😊

1 Like

[josephzizys](#) 255 July 13, 2023, 11:50am

Erik_ODonnell:

they lying or confused or something else?

I am claiming they are confused, mostly conceptually.

You cant have an experience without a sensation, like the nimitta for example, its a light. A light is a sight, its on the list, so it falls over before it even gets of the ground.

2 Likes

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 256 July 13, 2023, 11:53am

josephzizys:

You cant have an experience without a sensation, like the nimitta for example, its a light. A light is a sight, its on the list, so it falls over before it even gets of the ground.

But you must know no one is claiming jhanas are experiences without sensation?

The argument is that it's the mental bliss that's the sensation (including vitakka & vicara which is subtle mental movement in this line of reasoning)

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 257 July 13, 2023, 11:53am

josephzizys:

Ridiculous

LOL! I will take this to mean that you are not interested in any further discussion. Which, of course, is perfectly fine!

4 Likes

[josephzizys](#) 258 July 13, 2023, 11:56am

Brahmali:

LOL! I will take this to mean that you are not interested in any further discussion. Which, of course, is perfectly fine!

A fair assumption, but actually i was being hyperbolic as i often am when excited.

But ive said my bit, so will return to other projects.

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 259 July 13, 2023, 12:20pm

Brahmali:

I don't think anyone would say you can speak while in the fourth *jhāna*, or even think for that

matter.

Thank you for this message Venerable!

A priori, it seems to me that indeed, even for pro sense jhana, from the second jhāna, there are no more thoughts. Your sutta therefore seems to refute sense jhana.

I'm very interested in any replies you might get from the pro sense jhana (please, if you support these sense jhanas, feel free to reply!).

[kumara](#) 260 July 14, 2023, 12:05am

To me, this subject is important. Therefore, it's vital that I speak as accurately and clearly as I can. I cannot afford to do any less, even if I may be judged poorly for it.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 261 July 14, 2023, 1:10am

kumara:

To me, this subject is important. Therefore, it's vital that I speak as accurately and clearly as I can. I cannot afford to do any less, even if I may be judged poorly for it.

Venerable, 🙏 I don't really mind you voicing your thoughts aloud. But if you want to speak accurately and clearly, then maybe you can explain **why** it "is a very poor translation for *evambhūto*". I already [gave an example](#) where a compound ending in *-bhūto* refers to something that happened in the past and has ended, namely: "For in the past, venerable sir, when I was still a householder (*agārika-bhūto*)". (SN46.30) Why is it impossible for *evambhūto* to have a same sense of past?

Erik_ODonnell:

Ven. Sujato regularly posts about his translation choices, explains his philosophy, etc. right here on D&D. Making Ven. Sujato probably the most transparent translator of the EBTs to date.

He thinks the phrase is a bit ambiguous and best translated in a way that doesn't import too much meaning: "Following my usual 'principle of least meaning' we should avoid creating dramatic or difficult meanings out of simple or ambiguous terms." ([AN3.63 walking in 4th jhana? - #5 by sujato](#))

See also:

- [AN 3.64: walking while in jhanas? - #11 by Sylvester](#)
- [Suttas related to walking meditation? - #12 by Brahmali](#)

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 262 July 14, 2023, 1:29am

Sunyo:

Venerable, 🙏 I don't really mind you voicing your thoughts aloud. But if you want to speak accurately and clearly, then maybe you can explain **why** it "is a very poor translation for *evaṃbhūto*". I already [gave an example](#) where a compound ending in *-bhūto* refers to something that happened in the past and has ended, namely: "For in the past, venerable sir, when I was still a householder (*agārika-bhūto*)". ([SN46.30](#)) Why is it impossible for *evaṃbhūto* to have a same sense of past?

The *bhūto* in this example is conveyed in English as "was". Using this example as a template to translate *evaṃbhūto*, we get "**when I was thus**" (which I think is even better than B.Bodhi's "when I am in such a state").

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 263 July 14, 2023, 1:54am

That's a possible interpretation, and I'm happy to drop "state" from the translation, which isn't in the Pali. So it is an improvement on Ven. Bodhi's translation, in my opinion. But when glossing *evaṃbhūto*, the commentary to AN3.63 interprets it more as a perfect past, not a simple past (i.e. "having been" (*huttvā*) rather than "was"), which is also definitely possible. (Meaning having been in jhanas, afterwards you're walking.)

Since this is I think the only sutta where there is an indication to walking in jhanas, and since in the sutta itself the Buddha actually says he sits down before he enters jhāna, I think the commentary is more likely to be correct. Also because I can't see how one could walk without breathing, in the fourth jhana.

Bhante Sujato's translation is a middle way which let's us read it both ways. I don't think it is all that poor, considering. If he wanted to reflect his own view, then he could have done so a lot more directly.

2 Likes

[stephen](#) 264 July 14, 2023, 3:15am

Sunyo:

Since this is I think the only sutta where there is an indication to walking in jhanas, and since in the sutta itself the Buddha actually says he sits down before he enters jhāna, I think the commentary is more likely to be correct

Yes, I agree, and to force a different reading on it seems a case of starting from a pre established idea and combing through the texts in an effort to find something that vaguely supports it.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 265 July 14, 2023, 6:44am

kumara:

The *bhūto* in this example is conveyed in English as “was”. Using this example as a template to translate *evaṃbhūto*, we get “**when I was thus**” (which I think is even better than B.Bodhi’s “when I am in such a state”).

But if I were to re-translate it, I would prefer “**when I have become thus**”, which is probably the most literal translation possible without sounding un-English.

Compare that with “When I’m practicing like this” for *evaṃbhūto*.

1 Like

[stephen](#) 266 July 14, 2023, 10:41am

Again, the problem is that while it may be literal it is not idiomatic, it doesn't convey much meaning to the reader.

Maybe, 'when I have been doing this...'.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 267 July 14, 2023, 10:43am

Stephen, do you know Pali?

1 Like

[stephen](#) 268 July 14, 2023, 10:43am

Yes, and I am a native English language speaker.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 269 July 14, 2023, 10:47am

Good. So what's *evam* and what is it being translated into in 'when I have been doing this' or "when I'm practicing like this"?

1 Like

[stephen](#) 270 July 14, 2023, 10:53am

I'm afraid that you are not grasping my point.

Translation is not just a literal rendering of each word in the source language. It is creating a reading that conveys the sense of the original in an idiomatic way for the reader.

What you seem to be disagreeing with is the meaning of the text, not the translation.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 271 July 14, 2023, 11:13am

kumara:

But if I were to re-translate it, I would prefer “**when I have become thus**”, which is probably the most literal translation possible without sounding un-English.

Bhante, 🙏 I see where you're coming from.

But I don't think that translation works well in AN4.11, showing that literalism isn't always the answer.

I would probably translate it, following Monier-Williams' dictionary, “when I am of such nature (that I easily attain the jhanas, or that I attained the jhana earlier)”, or following the commentaries as “having been”. My point is, we both translate it in a biased way, in light of how we understand the jhānas, but Bhante Sujato's translations seems possible to me to be read both ways, and therefore is not biased.

Either way:

- The Bodhisattva sat down under the rose-apple tree before attaining first jhana
- He sat down under the Bodhi tree before he attained jhanas at his awakening
- Ānāpānassati, which includes jhanas, is always said to be done sitting down
- In [the fourth jhāna simile](#) one “sits down”
- The hindrances are abandoned and jhānas attained after sitting down in MN51
- In Thag9.1 the jhānas are attained when sitting down
- The Buddha says he feels exclusively pleasure (of 1st-3rd jhānas, it is implied) for seven days *without moving* in MN14
- (A bit ambiguous, perhaps, but the jhānas are said to be how the Buddha “lies down” in AN4.246)
- In DN16 he lays down before attaining the jhānas
- In this very sutta *itself* (AN3.63) the Buddha says he sits down before attaining the jhānas

From all this, and probably more, it seems to me that sitting (or lying), not moving, is a requirement for the jhānas. Opposed to all this we have a single sutta (in which the Buddha also explicitly says he sits down before attaining jhānas...) where our interpretation hinges on **one** ambiguous term *evaṃbhūto*. I don't know, but I wouldn't want my interpretation to depend on something like that.

(I also have lots of pragmatic issues. Why would one be able to move about, hear sounds, think, but not be able to speak, for example. But that's another thread.)

4 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 272 July 14, 2023, 12:03pm

Here we have samādhi occurring whilst walking.

Suppose a mendicant has got rid of desire and ill will while walking, and has given up dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. Their energy is roused up and unflagging, their mindfulness is established and lucid, their body is tranquil and undisturbed, and their mind is immersed in samādhi. Such a mendicant is said to be 'keen and prudent, always energetic and determined' when walking.

Carato cepi, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno abhijjhābyāpādo vigato hoti, thinamiddham ... uddhaccakukkuccaṃ ... vicikicchā pahīnā hoti, āraddham hoti vīriyaṃ asallīnaṃ, upaṭṭhitā sati asammuṭṭhā, passaddho kāyo asāraddho, samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ, carampi, bhikkhave, bhikkhu evambhūto 'ātāpī ottāpī satataṃ samitaṃ āraddhavīriyo pahitatto'ti vuccati.

AN 4.12

Here there is samādhi whilst being physically assaulted

My energy shall be roused up and unflagging, my mindfulness established and lucid, my body tranquil and undisturbed, and my mind immersed in samādhi. Gladly now, let fists, stones, sticks, and swords strike this body! For this is how the instructions of the Buddhas are followed.'

Āraddham kho pana me vīriyaṃ bhavissati asallīnaṃ, upaṭṭhitā sati asammuṭṭhā, passaddho kāyo asāraddho, samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ. Kāmaṃ dāni imasmiṃ kāye pañisamphassāpi kamantu, leḍḍusamphassāpi kamantu, daṇḍasamphassāpi kamantu, satthasamphassāpi kamantu, karīyati hidaṃ buddhānaṃ sāsanaṃ'ti.

MN 28

This doesn't read like the 5 senses are cut off, and does read like someone can walk around whilst in Jhāna.

6 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 273 July 14, 2023, 12:11pm

Also here

“Mendicants, there are five benefits of walking meditation. What five? You get fit for traveling, fit for striving in meditation, and healthy. What’s eaten, drunk, chewed, and tasted is properly digested. And immersion gained while walking lasts long. These are the five benefits of walking meditation.”

AN 5.29

5 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 274 July 14, 2023, 12:13pm

stephen:

I’m afraid that you are not grasping my point.

Translation is not just a literal rendering of each word in the source language. It is creating a reading that conveys the sense of the original in an idiomatic way for the reader.

What you seem to be disagreeing with is the meaning of the text, not the translation.

Why should we prefer the non-literal translation here?

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 275 July 14, 2023, 12:54pm

Ceisiwr:

Here we have *samādhi* occurring whilst walking.

Sure, but the term *samādhi* is used more widely than *jhānas*. *Jhāna* is **sammā** *samādhi*, not all *samādhi* is *sammā samādhi*. The question we’re having is not whether one can walk with some sort of *samādhi*, but whether one can walk in the *jhānas*.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 276 July 14, 2023, 1:33pm

Looks like it's talking about Jhana to me. The same pericope is used as elsewhere (settled, still, collected) and in my first post it's referring to the hindrances being abandoned. Doesn't Sujato argue that samadhi always refers to Jhana?

1 Like

[freedom](#) 277 July 14, 2023, 5:48pm

When I was sleeping, I was in a dream state. In this state, I walk, run...However, this does not mean that I was physically walking or running from my bed. In fact, I was still sleeping in my bed.

When I was sleeping, I was in a dream state. In this state, if I walk, my walking is dreamy. If I run, my running is dreamy.

When my mind is no longer affected by the five hindrances, it can easily enter and remain in jhanas. In this state, it is filled with joy, happiness... Obviously, this is the celestial state. In this celestial state, if I walk, my walking is celestial, if I stand, my standing is celestial. However, this does not mean that I physically walk or stand on that occasion.

When my mind is filled with unconditional love, it is in the divine state. In this state, if I walk, my walking is divine, if I stand, my standing is divine. However, this does not mean that I physically walk or stand on that occasion.

When I have abandoned greed, hatred, delusion, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them so that they are no more subject to future arising. Seeing that, my mind is in a state of noble ones. When I am in such a state, if I walk, my walking is noble, if I stand, my standing is noble. However, this does not mean that I must physically walk or stand on that occasion.

That is how I understand AN3.63.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 278 July 14, 2023, 6:48pm

Brahmali:

This is even clearer at [MN122](#) where one is said to speak when practicing like that i.e. the four *jhāna* and more. I don't think anyone would say you can speak while in the fourth *jhāna*, or even think for that matter.

Venerable, your argument is really interesting. So I reread the suttas several times carefully, and I noticed something.

In AN 3.63, the Buddha says that the meditator enters fourth jhana, and then he says :

Then, brahmin, when I am in such a state, if I walk back and forth, on that occasion my walking back and forth is celestial. If I am standing, on that occasion my standing is celestial. If I am sitting, on that occasion my sitting is celestial. If I lie down, on that occasion this is my celestial high and luxurious bed.

This is taken by some people as proof that one can walk in jhana.

And in MN 122, the Buddha says that the meditator enters fourth jhana, and then he says:

-

While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to walking, **they walk**, thinking

-

While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to standing, **they stand**, thinking

-

While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to sitting, **they sit**, thinking

-

While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to lying down, **they lie down**, thinking

-

While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to talking, they think

-

While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to thinking, they think

Reading carefully, I notice that unlike the body positions, the Buddha does not say “While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to talking, **they talk**, thinking”, but he does say “While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to talking, they think”.

So it doesn't seem as clear to me that someone holding AN 3.63 as proof should take MN 122 as proof that one can speak in jhana.

However, it is true that in this translation of MN 122, it says that one is “thinking” in jhana (just look at the quotes above). But I don't know if the word “thinking” here has the same meaning as vitakka and vicara. Perhaps the idea is to “comprehend” without relying on vitakka and vicara? I don't know, I don't know Pali at all.

And it seems to me that when the Buddha says “While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to thinking, they think”, we're in the same situation as for speech: the Buddha says that the meditator's mind can incline to use vitakka, but the Buddha doesn't say that the meditator uses vitakka (but I have the impression that here you need to know Pali, which is not my case).

Please correct me if I'm wrong.

[DeadBuddha](#) 279 July 14, 2023, 10:50pm

Sunyo:

Since this is I think the only sutta where there is an indication to walking in jhanas

Please Venerable, do you think MN 122 is a sutta showing that one can walk in jhana?

“If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu's mind inclines to walking, he walks: ‘Walking thus, the evil, unprofitable states of covetousness and grief will not invade me.’ Thus he is

possessed of full awareness therein.

<https://suttacentral.net/mn122/en/nyanamoli-thera?lang=fr&reference=main&highlight=false>

The answer to this question is not clear to me.

[Sunyo](#) 280 July 15, 2023, 2:47pm

Ceisiwr:

Looks like it's talking about Jhana to me. The same pericope is used as elsewhere (settled, still, collected) and in my first post it's referring to the hindrances being abandoned. Doesn't Sujato argue that samadhi always refers to Jhana?

That first post indeed says they abandoned the hindrances, but not that they attained jhana. You can abandon the hindrances without entering jhāna, because there is another thing you have to do, which is to become fully separated from kāmā (sensory experiences)". In fact, that this sutta specifically says "while walking" one abandons the hindrances but does NOT mentions jhāna or abandoning sensory experiences, I think speaks in favor of the non-bodily interpretation of jhana. I'd say it purposefully leaves "separated from sensory experiences" out, it and only mentions abandoning the hindrances, the latter of which I agree one can do while walking.

Bhante Sujato has stated samādhi has a broader meaning than jhānas as well, see Swift Pair of Messengers. So has Ānālayo, and I think most everybody, actually.

DeadBuddha:

Please Venerable, do you think [MN 122](#) is a sutta showing that one can walk in jhana?

No, unless you believe one can also think in the fourth jhāna.

(Edit: what I said here before wasn't right.)

Another text which uses very similar Pali is DN16: "Oh, how incredible, how amazing! Those who have gone forth remain in such peaceful meditations (vihārena viharanti)." It's clear does not mean to say that they dwell in these meditations RIGHT NOW, but that they do so generally. The same is the case in MN122.

4 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 281 July 15, 2023, 3:17pm

Thank you very much Bhante !

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 282 July 15, 2023, 3:31pm

Incidentally, there's one argument to which I'm very sensitive and which gives me the strong impression that Anapanasati is talking about the breathing body and not the biological body. Quite simply, the Buddha himself says this in MN 118:

Whenever a mendicant knows that they breathe heavily, or lightly, or experiencing the whole body, or stilling physical processes—**at that time they're meditating by observing an aspect of the body**—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world. **For I say that the in-breaths and out-breaths are an aspect of the body. That's why at that time a mendicant is meditating by observing an aspect of the body**—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world.

Whenever a mendicant practices breathing while experiencing rapture, or experiencing bliss, or experiencing mental processes, or stilling mental processes—**at that time they meditate observing an aspect of feelings**—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world. **For I say that careful application of mind to the in-breaths and out-breaths is an aspect of feelings. That's why at that time a mendicant is meditating by observing an aspect of feelings**—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of covetousness and displeasure for the world.

This gives me the very strong impression that, in fact, Anapanasati is only about one particular type of "body" and "sensations": the breath. And in fact, I'm inclined to think it's the same for the other tetrads.

In fact, perhaps something that gives some people the impression that the Buddha is talking about a biological body is that these people don't know that the Buddha has a rather "surprising" conception of breathing, since a nun places breathing in the category of bodily physical processes:

“Breathing is physical. It’s tied up with the body, that’s why breathing is a physical process.

(MN 44)

The first tetrad seems to focus on the physical body (breathing) but not on the biological body.

What do you think? It’s quite possible I’m talking nonsense...

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 283 July 15, 2023, 9:27pm

Dear Venerable [@Sunyo](#) , sorry to bother you, but please, I would like to have an information about Ajahn Brahm’s thought: does Ajahn Brahm think that one can practice insight meditation (often called vipassana - for example, contemplating impermanence) while being in jhana? In other words, for Ajahn Brahm, is it necessary to leave jhana in order to practice insight meditations?

[EDIT :

In his book *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, Ajahn Brahm says this (and it seems to suggest that insight-centered meditation cannot be practiced during jhana):

That is how the Buddha described ānāpānasati. It’s a complete practice that starts with just sitting down in a quiet place, on a comfortable seat, mindful of what’s in front of you and just watching the breath. Step by step—in steps that you know are within your ability—you reach these profound and blissful states called jhāna. When you emerge from them, you have any one of these four things to contemplate: anicca, the impermanence or uncertainty of things; virāga, the fading away of things; nirodha, cessation of self; and paṭiṇ issagga, letting go of all that’s “in here.” And if you reflect upon those things after the experience of jhāna, then something is going to happen. I often say that jhāna is the gunpowder and reflection is the match. If you put the two together, then there’s going to be a bang somewhere. It’s only a matter of time.

Such one-pointedness in space produces the peculiar experience, only found in jhāna, of nondual consciousness, where one is fully aware but only of one thing, and from one angle, for timeless periods. Consciousness is so focused

on the one thing that the faculty of comprehension is suspended a while. Only after the one-pointedness has dissipated, and one has emerged from the jhāna, will one be able to recognize these features of the first jhāna and comprehend them all.

End of the EDIT]

Thank you in advance Venerable, and thank you again for your great benevolence and the quality of your arguments. I am extremely touched by the fact of being able to discuss with people who give their whole life to the practice of the Dhamma...

[Brahmali](#) 284 July 15, 2023, 11:22pm

DeadBuddha:

Reading carefully, I notice that unlike the body positions, the Buddha does not say “While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to talking, **they talk**, thinking”, but he does say “While a mendicant is practicing such meditation, if their mind inclines to talking, they think”.

You are right about this. It is not clear that the talking happens “While a mendicant is practicing such meditation”, but it may well be implied. The fact that “their mind inclines to talking” suggests that it is close to happening.

DeadBuddha:

In other words, for Ajahn Brahm, is it necessary to leave jhana in order to practice insight meditations?

There is no word. It just says so, “he”, followed by a quote, with the idea of thinking implied. This is a common construction in Pali. There is no real difference between this and the use of the word *vitakka*.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 285 July 16, 2023, 8:52am

Thank you very much Venerable [@Brahmali](#) ! Just to be sure, about the second part of your message, were you replying to something other than the one you quoted?

[Brahmali](#) 286 July 16, 2023, 11:32am

Sorry, it was a reply to this:

DeadBuddha:

However, it is true that in this translation of [MN 122](#), it says that one is “thinking” in jhana (just look at the quotes above). But I don’t know if the word “thinking” here has the same meaning as vitakka and vicara.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 287 July 16, 2023, 11:45pm

DeadBuddha:

Incidentally, there’s one argument to which I’m very sensitive and which gives me the strong impression that Anapanasati is talking about the breathing body and not the biological body. Quite simply, the Buddha himself says this in [MN 118](#):

In the Pali it is even clearer. It literally says, “I call the in-breaths-out-breaths a certain body (*kāya*) inside the body”. I would translate the phrase more like Bhante Sujato too, but now you can see that in Pali the breath is equated to being a *kāya*. So when earlier it says “experience the whole *kāya*”, the Buddha explains in this very same sutta that this means the whole breath.

This I take to mean “whole” as in from the beginning to the end and back. This is a progression from just noticing the length of the breath, for which you only need to know how much time there is between the beginning and end. You can lose some track of the breath in between those two end points, not being aware of the “whole breath”.

Some Sanskrit and Chinese parallels also do not use “(whole) body” for this step but “(whole) bodily activity”, which in context of meditation refers to the breath (MN44). (Not in context of Dependent Arising, where it refers to bodily karma.)

I'm not sure exactly how this relates to the question whether jhānas are bodily states or not, but perhaps you are referring to the wider use of kāya, going beyond just 'physical body'. Indeed, you're right, the word kāya has a much wider meaning than just physical body. But at times it also goes beyond *any* aspects of the body. Among other things, it also can refer to the person more generally, just like we say 'somebody'.

In the third jhāna "by the *kāya*" (*kāyena*) means "by the person", i.e. "personally":

And with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, **personally** (*kāyena*) experiencing the bliss of **which the noble ones declare**, 'Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.'

The point is, one *personally* experiences the sukha one has heard about from the noble ones before.

Why do the noble ones declare something about this jhana but not the others? It could just be a quirk, but perhaps it's because the third jhāna is in some limited sense the ultimate "blissful abiding" (*sukhavihara*), a term the noble ones mention in many suttas. In the fourth jhana the sukha ceases, so it's not a *sukhavihara* anymore in a way (although it still is in a higher sense of the word). But regardless of why it is here, since such a statement by the noble ones is only found in the third jhāna formula, and *kāyena* is **also** only found in the third jhāna formula, it seems the two must go together, and they do very well. Elsewhere one is also said to experience "*kāyena*" (personally) what one has heard from others.

For example SN48.50, which I think Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translated way too literally:

As to these things that previously I had only heard about, now I dwell having contacted them with the body [or "personally"] and, having pierced them through with wisdom, I see.

He makes the same mistake of being overly literal in the third jhana formula, in my view.

The word *kāyena* has the sense of 'personally' in many other places too, and it even refers to *nibbāna* sometimes. In AN9.43 it is explained what *kāyena* means with respect to the jhānas, *and* arūpas *and* the cessation of perception. 😊 Elsewhere *nibbāna* is also said to be experienced "*kāyena*". (E.g. SN48.54, Iti73, AN6.46) Do we feel all those things "with the body"? No.

DeadBuddha:

In other words, for Ajahn Brahm, is it necessary to leave jhana in order to practice insight meditations?

You answered your own question.

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 288 July 17, 2023, 8:49am

Thank you very much!

[DeadBuddha](#) 289 July 17, 2023, 2:29pm

Sunyo:

You answered your own question.

Ahah perfect!

By the way, do you know if there's a sutta saying that we have to emerge from jhana before practicing vipassana?

It could be interesting for our subject, as Ajahn Brahm seems to be saying that it's precisely because of extreme concentration in one point that our understanding is temporarily suppressed. Whether we need to emerge from the jhanas to practice insight meditation may make us lean a little more towards non-corporeal jhana or corporeal jhana.

Below are things that give me the impression that you don't have to emerge from the first 7 jhanas to practice insight meditation towards them.

In MN 111, AN 4.124, AN 9.36, MN 64, and MN 52, they talk about practicing insight meditation (impermanence, non-self, dissatisfaction) about the jhanas, but they don't talk about emerging from the first 7 jhanas.

- MN 111 talks about practising insight with the 9 jhanas, but it's only for the last 2 jhanas ("neither perception nor non-perception" and "cessation of perception and feeling") that Sariputta is said to emerge from the jhana to inspect it.
- AN 4.124 speaks of practicing insight with the 4 rupajhana, without specifying that one must emerge from them. Don't mention the other 5 jhanas.
- MN 64 speaks of practicing insight with the first 7 jhanas, without specifying that one must emerge from them. Don't mention the other 2 jhanas.
- MN 52 talks about practicing insight with the first 7 jhanas, without specifying that one must emerge from them. Don't mention the other 2 jhanas.

- AN 9.36 talks about practising insight with the first 7 jhanas, and says that “penetration of final knowledge” can only happen with the first 7 jhanas, and says that to describe/explain the last 2 jhanas (“neither perception nor non-perception” and “cessation of perception and feeling”) one must emerge from these jhanas (this is not specified for the other jhanas).

All this gives me the strong impression that insight meditation can be performed during the jhanas. Of course, you know these suttas much better than I do, but I was interested in your thoughts.

Thanks again Bhante for your kindness and help!

EDIT: rereading this [topic](#) and this [message](#), I realize that you’ve already answered my questions, great!

Please, do you know the name of Venerable Analayo’s paper on MN 111? I’d love to read it. Thanks in advance.

[Upasaka_Dhammasara](#) 290 July 17, 2023, 6:36pm

My friend its only understand by seeing jhanas as the states we experience as humans

Waking, dreaming, deep sleep

4th jhana is what?

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 291 July 17, 2023, 11:29pm

Sunyo:

And with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, **personally** (*kāyena*) experiencing the bliss of **which the noble ones declare**, ‘Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.’

If this is the translation, then the simile of third jhana that referring to physical body will be in conflict with this translation and many other sutta. See below:

Simile of third jhana:

It's like a pool with blue water lilies, or pink or white lotuses. Some of them sprout and grow in the water without rising above it, thriving underwater. From the tip to the root they're drenched, steeped, filled, and soaked with *cool water*. There's **no part of them that's not soaked with cool water**.

In the same way, a mendicant drenches, steeps, fills, and spreads their **body** with bliss free of rapture. There's no part of the **body** that's not spread with bliss free of rapture. This pertains to their samadhi.

The fact is that it is probably referring to the transformation of the physical body itself, it is more logical. The body is cooled with perfected precepts, then the mind is cooled with samadhi + wisdom.

As the jhana progress, the desires (fire) + other feelings are abandoned permanently with wisdom, the breathing is slow down/cease, the physical body transform become cool permanently. This happens NOT only during sitting meditation, but any posture(s).

This is also collaborated with SN 41.6 of difference between someone who reached sannavedayitanirodha and a death person.

"What's the difference between someone who has passed away and a mendicant who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling?"

"When **someone dies**, their physical, verbal, and mental processes have ceased and stilled; their **vitality is spent**; their **warmth is dissipated**; and their **faculties (indriya) have disintegrated**.

When **a mendicant has attained the cessation of perception and feeling**, their physical, verbal, and mental processes have ceased and stilled. But their **vitality is not spent**; their **warmth is not dissipated**; and their **faculties (indriya) are very clear**.

That's the difference between someone who has passed away and a mendicant who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling."

So, someone who has reached cessation of perception and feeling will have a body similar to death body, but only little warmth and vitality is remained, but the senses (indriya) are very clear & bright due to no hindrances (most of the time).

vs death body is totally cool without any sign of life and the body will disintegrate over time.

Also, human is a physical world. We see each other in terms of the physical body interaction (speech/action).

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 292 July 17, 2023, 11:35pm

Brahmali:

When I'm practicing like this, if I walk, at that time my walking is heavenly.

An Arahant will not be practicing anymore. They will just use the wisdom to maintaining/live/stay in jhana day in and day out to enjoy blissful life till death of body.

Only a sekha is still practicing.

Remember SN 54.11 and many others:

Those bhikkhus who are arahants, whose taints are destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, those completely liberated through final knowledge: for them samadhi by mindfulness of breathing, when developed and cultivated, leads to a **pleasant dwelling in this very life** and to sati and sampajjana.**

1 Like

[stephen](#) 293 July 18, 2023, 1:19am

Here, the English word 'practicing' refers to engaging in jhāna, doing jhāna, being 'in' jhāna, not learning how to get better at it.

We see this idiomatic usage in phrases like, "I've been practicing medicine for 20 years", or, "Having been a doctor for 40 years, I've decided to close my practice."

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 294 July 18, 2023, 4:58am

DeadBuddha:

By the way, do you know if there's a sutta saying that we have to emerge from jhana before practicing vipassana?

Ajahn Brahmalī and I addressed some of these ideas in a [talk](#) linked earlier in this thread. But I don't mind restating some of these things.

- AN9.35 for example says, “When a mendicant enters *and emerges* from all these attainments [including jhānas], their mind becomes pliable and workable.”
- [AN5.28](#) mentions remembering and reviewing the jhānas in order to “penetrate and grasp them with wisdom”. This is mentioned as an aspect of developing samādhi. This statement does not make a whole lot of sense if you can also contemplate the jhānas while you're in them, which, if you could, would seem to be a much better moment to “grasp them with wisdom”.

When the suttas leave the emerging from jhāna unmentioned, it's like I'd say, “John went to bed at 9 o'clock. In the morning he made breakfast before going to work.” Now, if you replied, “you didn't say John got out of bed to have breakfast”, you're technically right. But that doesn't mean I therefore meant to say that John made breakfast in bed! And if you'd insist that I should have clarified that, you're just being overly demanding on how language is used, where things are always implied.

It's the same with the jhānas in the kind of suttas you mentioned. Some people sort of insist the text should phrase things the way they'd expect, that they should always mention one needs to come out of jhāna. But the audience in the time of the Buddha would have known what these states were like, so they didn't always need to be told one has to come out of them in order to contemplate. That would've been so obvious to them (as it will be to anyone who attains them nowadays), that it wasn't considered necessary to mention all the time, just like I wouldn't need to say John got out of bed to make breakfast.

But the fact remains that we *do* have some references in the canon that one has to come out of jhāna. These admittedly aren't super common, but I think that these ideas are implied in all other texts as well. The alternative interpretation doesn't make sense to me: if one *could* contemplate in jhana, then why are there even a few such statements that say you emerge before the mind is malleable, or that you understand them when you review them?

The general way in which the suttas are phrased is in large part due to the nature of oral literature, which uses standardized passages. The jhāna formulas are always exactly the same, just “copy pasted” from elsewhere, as are the insights that follow, generally. We shouldn't expect from these texts a detailed moment-by-moment step-by-step description like a personal teacher would give us nowadays.

Some of the suttas you mentioned I specifically addressed in the talk I linked earlier. Other than that:

- AN9.36 says you can't become enlightened based on the two last attainments, but this directly contradicts what all other suttas say. A very common statement in the canon is: "[A mendicant] enters and remains in the cessation of perception and feeling. And, having seen with wisdom, their defilements come to an end." So I'm not sure what AN9.36 is on about. It also has no parallels. (PS. If we're overly literal, then "having seen with wisdom" would also imply that one contemplates inside cessation of perception and feeling, since it's never said that they come out of it.)
- The Chinese parallel to MN64 (at MA205) mentions a very different way to develop insight based on jhānas, namely to contemplate the rise and fall of them, which implies that the jhāna has ceased when you do this (otherwise how can you contemplate the fall?)
- The Chinese parallel to MN52 doesn't end at the 7th attainment.

DeadBuddha:

Please, do you know the name of Venerable Analayo's paper on [MN 111](#)? I'd love to read it.
Thanks in advance.

It's in [Early Buddhist Meditation Studies](#). Also worth reading are the sections on not hearing sound in jhāna and on vitakka-vicāra not meaning verbal thinking, but "thought" on a more subtle level.

(I'm not too keen on Venerable's interpretation of Ānapanassati, though, or that in jhāna one feels the body in some sort of refined way. In both these cases the disagreement comes back to the word *kāya* we discussed earlier.)

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 295 July 18, 2023, 5:01am

Joe.C:

If this is the translation, then the simile of third jhana that referring to physical body will be in conflict with this translation and many other sutta. See below:

I do wonder why Bhante [@Sujato](#) translates the jhāna similes like that, since he wrote in *A History of Mindfulness*:

These beautiful images of embodied bliss complement the psychological jhāna formulas. [...] It would be a mistake to think that 'body' here refers to the ordinary physical body, which completely disappears in jhāna. The Suttas use 'body' in an idiomatic sense to stress the

immediacy of direct personal experience; the meaning is something like ‘the entire field of awareness’.

Tse-fu Kuan, who has done the most in-depth investigation of the term that I’m aware of, likewise wrote in *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*: “the simile-accompanied glosses on the jhānas ... contain the term kāya, [which] here probably refers to the experiencer of sensation”.

Both Pāli Text Society dictionaries, when specifically referring to these similes under *kāya*, suggest similar ideas: “experiencer” or “being” or “inner sense”, not “body”. So in [my translation](#) I use ‘experience’.

It can’t be the body that feels the pīti and sukha, because in the suttas the pīti that is felt in the first two jhānas is repeatedly called mental (pīti-māna). It’s similar with the sukha, which is called non-physical (nirāmisa) and in other ways is indicated to be mental. For example, it is said in MN139 that the sukha that comes from the body (and other physical senses) is not to be developed, and that one should seek sukha “internally”, i.e. in the mind.

The second jhāna simile also talks about the water in the lake (which stands for sukha) not coming from the four quarters nor the sky (= the 5 senses) but “wells up from within” (= coming from the mind). From my translation:

You drenched, suffused, filled, and pervaded your experience with [mental] delight and bliss caused by the unification, so that there is no single part of your whole experience that is not pervaded with it. Imagine a lake which has no water flowing in from the east, west, north, or south, and which is also never replenished with rain. But it has water welling up within. The spring of water welling up within the lake drenches, suffuses, fills, and pervades that lake with cool water, so that no single part of the lake is not pervaded with it. Likewise, you drenched, suffused, filled, and pervaded your experience with delight and bliss caused by the unification, so that there is no single part of your whole experience that is not pervaded with it. That is the second step in the development of the noble five-factored right unification of the mind.

(I also explained these similes [in this talk](#).)

Joe.C:

So, someone who has reached cessation of perception and feeling will have a body similar to death body, but only little warmth and vitality is remained, but the senses (indriya) are very clear & bright due to no hindrances (most of the time).

If you have no perception and feeling (= no consciousness), you can’t have “very clear” awareness through the senses. Since this is opposed to a dead person whose faculties have “disintegrated”, it

must mean their senses are still able to function afterwards. I expect that's why Bhikkhu Bodhi translates "faculties *become* exceptionally clear", rather than "are very clear".

4 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 296 July 18, 2023, 8:20am

Sunyo:

So I'm not sure what [AN9.36](#) is on about. It also has no parallels. (PS. If we're overly literal, then "having seen with wisdom" would also imply that one contemplates inside cessation of perception and feeling, since it's never said that they come out of it.)

Whilst not listed on SuttaCentral it did once have a parallel as it's quoted entirely in the Sarvastivada Abhidharma. Based on this sutta, insight occurs whilst in Jhana. That contradicts an absorbed view.

4 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 297 July 18, 2023, 9:16am

Ceisiwr:

Whilst not listed on SuttaCentral it did once have a parallel as it's quoted entirely in the Sarvastivada Abhidharma. Based on this sutta, insight occurs whilst in Jhana. That contradicts an absorbed view.

Does that quoted parallel literally say that one is *in* jhana while one does contemplate? Or is it implied in the same way John is implied to stay in bed while he cooks breakfast in my (admittedly mundane) example?

AN9.36 also says "they contemplate the phenomena (of the jhana) as *impermanent ... as falling apart*". I would argue that one can only do this effectively after the jhana has ended, because while it is present, you can't see its falling apart and impermanence.

I mean, some take the relative absence of explicit mentions that the meditator emerges from jhana as evidence that one can contemplate in them. But I could use the same line of reasoning and say

that no sutta explicitly says that one has to stay in jhana to contemplate them. It's an interpretation added on top of what is actually said. So that "proves" that in jhana one can't contemplate.

Few would buy that argument, however, which shows you can't really argue from absence of what is said. You have to go by what is actually said. And, as I said before, there are actually some texts that say that one has to come out of jhana, "remember" and "review" them. I would actually include MN111 in that, for it says Sariputta only understood these phenomena after they had disappeared.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 298 July 18, 2023, 10:21am

Thank you so much Venerable for your reply!!!

Sunyo:

[AN9.35](#) for example says, "When a mendicant enters *and emerges* from all these attainments [including jhānas], their mind becomes pliable and workable."

This sutta confused me when I read it, because at first sight it goes against the impressions I had!

But on rereading it, I get the impression that the sutta is a little ambiguous.

For example, one might think that when the Buddha speaks of a meditator who "emerges from all these attainments", he's talking specifically about a meditator who has successively attained all the jhanas (from the first jhana to the cessation of perception of feeling - it's this succession that the sutta describes), so that at the end the meditator is in the 9th jhana and must therefore emerge to be able to realize things through insight.

Especially if we consider that the Buddha meant here that even having only reached the first jhana, one must emerge from this first jhana to be able to realize things with insight, then this implies some strange things in relation to the rest of the sutta. Indeed, what is the Buddha talking about when he speaks of the things we become capable of realizing through insight? In the sutta, he talks about multiplying oneself, reading people's minds, walking through walls, diving into the earth, walking on water and so on. Now, maybe I'm wrong, but it seemed to me that attaining the first jhana is not enough to accomplish these things. So it would seem a little strange to me if the Buddha meant that even when you reach the first jhana, you have to emerge from it to be able to achieve things through insight.

What do you think?

Sunyo:

It can't be the body that feels the pīti and sukha, because in the suttas the pīti that is felt in the first two jhānas is repeatedly called mental (pīti-māna). It's similar with the sukha, which is called non-physical (nirāmisa) and in other ways is indicated to be mental. For example, it is said in [MN139](#) that the sukha that comes from the body (and other physical senses) is not to be developed, and that one should seek sukha "internally", i.e. in the mind.

Interesting. It's true that in the context of body jhanas, it seems to me that piti and sukha are felt at the level of the biological body. But even within these bodily jhanas, the origin of piti and sukha seems to be a mental exercise of meditation (for example, some say to concentrate on the breath, then on a pleasant sensation; or some say to have an enlarged attention on the body and the breath; etc.). In the sense that even in these jhanas, the origin of piti and sukha is not a material contact between the body and an object, even if they are felt in the biological body ; for example, since the piti and sukha of body jhanas come from the mental exercises of meditation - even if they are felt in the biological body - piti and sukha do not therefore have the same origin as the bodily pleasure of sexual intercourse (material contact of the sexes), or of tasting a good gourmet meal (material contact of tongue and food).

So the idea of bodily jhana doesn't necessarily seem contradictory to the point you're making here.

I also wanted to thank you for the content you gave me. I will check it out. And thanks for all the dhamma talk you give, it's a gold mine for practicing the Dhamma!

1 Like

[Erik ODonnell](#) 299 July 18, 2023, 10:27am

Sunyo:

I mean, some take the relative absence of explicit mentions that the meditator emerges from jhana as evidence that one can contemplate in them. But I could use the same line of reasoning and say that no sutta explicitly says that one has to stay in jhana to contemplate them. It's an interpretation added on top of what is actually said. So that "proves" that in jhana one can't contemplate.

To add some context, the type of "proof" you are describing (as bad reasoning) is basically the [moving the goalposts fallacy](#):

Moving the goalposts is an [informal fallacy](#) in which evidence presented in response to a specific claim is dismissed and some other (often greater) evidence is demanded. That is, after an attempt has been made to score a goal, the goalposts are moved to exclude the attempt. [\[14\]](#) The problem with changing the rules of the game is that the meaning of the result is changed, too. [\[15\]](#)

Aha! but the Buddha didn't say it in EXACTLY a way that would 100% unambiguously prove your argument, therefore you must be wrong.

Like, the whole exercise here is that we're trying to decide between a small set of plausible interpretations of the Pali in the EBTs 😊

5 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 300 July 18, 2023, 10:51am

DeadBuddha:

For example, one might think that when the Buddha speaks of a meditator who “emerges from all these attainments”, he’s talking specifically about a meditator who has successively attained all the jhanas

The specific translation is probably what confuses you. Bhikkhu Bodhi has: “When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu enters and emerges from **each** of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy.” The Pali has a distributive because it’s repeating the pronoun (*taṃ*), so this is what it most naturally means, *each* of these attainments, including the first jhana. I’m pretty sure that is also what Ven Sujato has in mind with “all”.

I personally am also a bit wary about suttas that claim one can get enlightened from the first jhāna, but that is what it says. (I think there’s also other suttas that seem to this, although I can’t remember them at the moment.)

DeadBuddha:

since the piti and sukha of body jhanas come from the mental exercises of meditation - even if they are felt in the biological body - piti and sukha do not therefore have the same origin as the bodily pleasure of sexual intercourse (material contact of the sexes),

They're still "cognized by the body", though, and that is how the five *kāmaguṇas* (five "sense stimulations") are explained, which are so often opposed to the *jhānas*. Some people can also imagine sex scenes and get orgasms or other pleasant bodily feelings without touching themselves. Then that is also caused by the mind, but it is still a sensual pleasure.

In AN2.70 it is said:

"There are, mendicants, these two kinds of happiness (*sukha*). What two? Physical (*kāya*) happiness and mental (*citta*) happiness. These are the two kinds of happiness. The better of these two kinds of happiness is mental happiness."

We can compare to AN2.68:

"There are, mendicants, these two kinds of happiness (*sukha*). What two? Material happiness and spiritual happiness. These are the two kinds of happiness. The better of these two kinds of happiness is spiritual happiness."

The *jhānas* are often called "spiritual happiness" as opposed to "material happiness" which is said to come from the five senses. Now in light of AN2.70 this simply means mental happiness as opposed to bodily happiness.

Bhante Sujato's translations aren't consistent and use both "material" & "of the flesh" (for *sāmisa*), and "spiritual" & "not-of-the flesh" (for *nirāmisa*, the latter of which is most literal). With that in mind, here is one example where the pleasure (*sukha*) of the *jhanas* is opposed to bodily pleasure (SN36.31):

And what is pleasure (*sukha*) of the flesh [or "material"]? Mendicants, there are these five kinds of sensual stimulation. What five? Sights known by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds ... Smells ... Tastes ... Touches **known [or 'cognized'] by the body**, [which] are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. These are the five kinds of sensual stimulation. The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called pleasure of the flesh.

And what is pleasure (*sukha*) not of the flesh [or "spiritual"]? [1st, 2nd, 3rd *jhāna*] This is called pleasure not of the flesh.

We can put this aside DN9 (my translation):

When they get fully separated from sensory experiences and separated from unskillful states of mind, they attain the first *jhana*, where there is delight and bliss (*sukha*) caused by the

separation [from the sensory experiences], to which the mind moves and holds on. The perception of sensory experiences which they had before, ceases. At that time there is subtle but true perception of delight and bliss caused by the separation, and they **only** (*eva*) have that perception, subtle but true, of delight and bliss caused by the separation. That is how through training some perceptions [of the five senses] cease while others [of *pītisukha*] arise.

This to me is clearly talking about the *jhānas* being a mental pleasure—and moreover, also about not being able to feel the body anymore, because the only perception you have is of the mental delight and bliss.

3 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 301 July 18, 2023, 11:16am

Sunyo:

This to me is clearly talking about the *jhānas* being a mental pleasure—and moreover, also about not being able to feel the body anymore, because the only perception you have is of the mental delight and bliss.

You are misunderstand the Pali in DN9. I know, because I did so myself once. Ven. Dhammanando was kind enough to correct me. I'll post it soon, and reply to your other previous posts.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 302 July 18, 2023, 12:17pm

Let me know what I'm getting wrong. If it's just the word *eva*, then that might indeed be interpreted differently, as Sujato seems to do, because it is used in different senses. But considering context, with the cessation of certain perceptions (which are sensual) and the arising of other perceptions, which is "a subtle but true perception" of *pītisukha* (which is mental) the overall idea seems pretty clear to me.

2 Likes

[Joe.C](#) 303 July 18, 2023, 1:00pm

Sunyo:

[AN9.35](#) for example says, “When a mendicant enters *and emerges*

This enters and emerges can just be misleading.

The pali term is samāpajjatipi vuṭṭhātipi

samāpajjatipi also can be translated as **to reach** from pali dictionary.

vuṭṭhātipi can also be translated as **to produce** (aka result) or even **to stay**.

Emerges is just doesn't make senses for 1st up to 7th jhana because the vinnana is still present all the time except the last 2 jhana.

If one is emerges from jhana, where is the mind stay during this emerging. This needs to be answer for one who translate as emerges.

Also many other sutta, it is said to reach and remain and never lose it in jhana such as AN 4.123

If they **live in that**, are committed to it, and stay on it **often without losing it**, when they die they're reborn in the company of the gods of Brahmā's Host.

If one is losing the jhana, well doesn't that mean the mind is go back to 5 senses. Then, more birth in sensual realm.

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 304 July 18, 2023, 1:21pm

Joe.C:

If one is emerges from jhana, where is the mind stay during this emerging. This needs to be answer for one who translate as emerges.

What do you mean? It stays in the jhāna or it isn't in jhana. There isn't an in-between where it is during emerging. Emerging is instant, it doesn't take time.

Joe.C:

If one is losing the jhana

It means you lose the ability to attain it, not that you come out of jhāna.

The rest of your post I can't take seriously, sorry. You can't learn Pali from a dictionary, I'm afraid.

Here is another example where emerging from the jhāna is implied, even though not explicitly mentioned after the attainment of the jhāna:

Then, in the evening, the Venerable Sariputta emerged from seclusion and went to Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's Park. The Venerable Ananda saw the Venerable Sariputta coming in the distance and said to him: "Friend Sariputta, your faculties are serene, your facial complexion is pure and bright. In what dwelling has the Venerable Sariputta spent the day?" [I.e. he's no longer in that "dwelling", which is the first jhāna.]

"Here, friend, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered and dwelt in the first jhana, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. (*) Yet, friend, it did not occur to me, 'I am attaining the first jhana,' or 'I have attained the first jhana,' or 'I have emerged from the first jhana.'"

"It must be because I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit have been thoroughly uprooted in the Venerable Sariputta for a long time that such thoughts did not occur to him." (SN28.1)

(*) It's not mentioned, but at some point Sariputta obviously came out of jhāna, because he talks about "I have emerged" just after.

Now, suttas that directly follow the jhānas with some sort of contemplation similarly imply that one has come out.

If coming out of jhāna is even left unmentioned in a sutta where Sāriputta directly after says "I have emerged from the first jhana", how much more so in other texts where the nature of jhāna is not the concern, but the insight that follow? 😊

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 305 July 18, 2023, 1:30pm

Sunyo:

The specific translation is probably what confuses you. Bhikkhu Bodhi has: “When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu enters and emerges from **each** of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy.” The Pali has a distributive because it’s repeating the pronoun (taṃ), so this is what it most naturally means, *each* of these attainments, including the first jhana. I’m pretty sure that is also what Ven Sujato has in mind with “all”.

Ah, as far as Pali is concerned, I can’t judge because I don’t know anything about it, it’s you who know.

But I had also read Venerable Bodhi’s translation, and I found it as ambiguous as Sujato’s. Personally, I don’t find that the word “each” implies either that « *we’re talking about a meditator who has successively gone through “each” of the 9 jhanas* », or that « *we’re talking about a meditator who has gone through “each” jhanas taken separately (i.e. without it being necessary to do all 9 jhanas)* ».

I personally am also a bit wary about suttas that claim one can get enlightened from the first jhāna, but that is what it says. (I think there’s also other suttas that seem to this, although I can’t remember them at the moment.)

I understand. And apart from awakening, can you remind me if there are suttas saying that the first jhana is enough to walk on water, cross walls, etc.? I’m not sure.

Sunyo:

Some people can also imagine sex scenes and get orgasms or other pleasant bodily feelings without touching themselves. Then that is also caused by the mind, but it is still a sensual pleasure.

Sunyo:

This to me is clearly talking about the jhānas being a mental pleasure—and moreover, also about not being able to feel the body anymore, because the only perception you have is of the mental delight and bliss.

Thank you very much for all these explanations. You manage to explain the Dhamma in a very synthetic way while quoting suttas as references; it’s simply incredible. Truly Bhante, your messages are clear paths that your readers can follow to understand and practice the Dhamma. This makes me very happy.

To return to the subject, perhaps not only is the pleasure of bodily jhanas derived from the mind, but perhaps it is purely mental? I mean, maybe even if this pleasure is felt in the body (so that the meditator manages to feel this pleasure soaked into all his limbs, including the tips of his toes), the

pleasure is still not felt thanks to the biological organs, but remains a pure creation of the mind? Mmh, that doesn't seem aberrant to me, I can imagine it.

[Ceisiwr](#) 306 July 18, 2023, 3:06pm

On the Jhāna sutta the reference is here

The Pāli Jhāna Sutta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya also indicates that insight is developed while one is in the first seven meditative attainments—the four dhyānas and the three lower formless attainments—called “attainments with perception” (saññāsamāpatti).⁵⁷⁵ This explains that perception (saññā/samjñā) is the decisive factor for the development of insight. Due to the limitation of perception in the base of neither perception- nor non-perception and the absence of perception in the attainment of cessation (nirodha-samāpatti), there is no development of insight within these two attainments. In the Jhāna Sutta, a yogin develops insight for the destruction of the taints while in the first dhyāna thus:

“Here, monks, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. Whatever states are included there comprised by form, feeling, perception, volitional formations or consciousness; he views those states as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a boil, as a dart, as misery, as affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as empty, as non-self. Having viewed them thus, his mind then turns away from those states and focuses upon the deathless element.”

The parallel of the Jhāna Sutta is not found in the Chinese Āgamas, but is completely preserved in the Dharmaskandha, one of the six pāda works in the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma.⁵⁷⁷ It is called Qiyi jing 七依經 in the Chinese canon, and is cited by the Abhidharma masters of different schools to demonstrate that the śamatha needed by a yogin to develop insight is the four dhyānas and the three lower formless attainments, namely the “attainments with perception.”⁵⁷⁸ The Mahāvibhāṣā, the Tattvasiddhiśāstra, the Prakaraṇāryavākāśāstra, and the Abhidharmasamuccayavyākhyā all cite the Qiyijing 七依經 to explain that the extirpation of taints occurs dependent on the first seven meditative attainments; that is, insight is developed while one is in the attainments with perception.⁵⁷⁹

Issues in Śamatha and Vipassanā: A Comparative Study of Buddhist Meditation

Insight occurs whilst in any attainment up until the final two. There, because there is hardly any perception or none at all, insight has to occur after leaving those attainments.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 307 July 18, 2023, 3:52pm

DeadBuddha:

Ah, as far as Pali is concerned, I can't judge because I don't know anything about it, it's you who know. But I had also read Venerable Bodhi's translation, and I found it as ambiguous as Sujato's. Personally, I don't find that the word "each" implies either that « *we're talking about a meditator who has successively gone through "each" of the 9 jhanas* », or that « *we're talking about a meditator who has gone through "each" jhanas taken separately (i.e. without it being necessary to do all 9 jhanas)* ».

Ah, I see what you mean now.

I take it to mean that after *any* of these attainments their mind becomes malleable and capable. One reason is the very next discourse, AN9.36:

"Mendicants, I say that the first absorption is a basis for ending the defilements. The second absorption is also a basis for ending the defilements. [And so forth, up to and including the cessation of perception and feeling.]

When in AN9.35 the Buddha says "a bhikkhu enters and emerges from each of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy", it seems to me to say you can use any of these states to become enlightened, which is exactly what AN9.36 explains.

Also, the phrase "a bhikkhu enters and emerges from each of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy" is followed by "they become capable of realizing anything that can be realized by insight to which they extend the mind, in each and every case." (AN9.35) And that phrase is elsewhere also used after abandoning the hindrances in general, like AN3.101-102; and AN5.23:

But when the mind is free of these five corruptions [=hindrances] it's pliable, workable, and radiant. It's not brittle, and is completely immersed in samādhī for the ending of defilements. You become capable of realizing anything that can be realized by insight to which you extend the mind, in each and every case.

This reads to me like after the first jhana you already become capable of doing these things.

DeadBuddha:

I understand. And apart from awakening, can you remind me if there are suttas saying that the first jhana is enough to walk on water, cross walls, etc.? I'm not sure.

I don't know if any text *specifically* says after **first** jhana you become capable of the psychic powers. Usually that statement follows the fourth jhāna, but perhaps that is just for sake of brevity. You don't want to repeat that whole long passage of the psychic powers after each jhāna.

I'm personally somewhat skeptical of awakening after the first jhāna (even though the suttas do say so, so maybe I should be less skeptical), but of the psychic powers I'm not. They are easier than awakening, so you also need less powerful samādhi.

DeadBuddha:

To return to the subject, perhaps not only is the pleasure of bodily jhanas derived from the mind, but perhaps it is purely mental? I mean, maybe even if this pleasure is felt in the body (so that the meditator manages to feel this pleasure soaked into all his limbs, including the tips of his toes), the pleasure is still not felt thanks to the biological organs, but remains a pure creation of the mind? Mmh, that doesn't seem aberrant to me, I can imagine it.

I suppose that's how some people think of jhānas, but in my opinion it is still going in the wrong direction, namely outwards rather than inwards.

The mental joy (piti-māna) that results in jhānas is frequently said to result from things like contemplating one's generosity, one's virtue, and so forth. This gives rise to a happy feeling in the mind, which becomes the object in jhāna. The point isn't that you spread this kind of joy through the body, the point is that you focus on it and let it become the only thing you're aware of.

The Buddha was also able to sit still for 7 days feeling exclusively pleasure. Maybe I lack imagination, but I can't see how you'd do that with body awareness going, even if that is somehow "soaked" with the mind. At some point your body will start aching. I do see how you'd be able to do so if you're able to completely withdraw the mind from the body, though.

DeadBuddha:

Thank you very much for all these explanations. You manage to explain the Dhamma in a very synthetic way while quoting suttas as references; it's simply incredible. Truly Bhante, your messages are clear paths that your readers can follow to understand and practice the Dhamma. This makes me very happy.

Just as a disclaimer, I'm sure I'm not flawless. I may change my mind on some of the details I've shared. 😊

I'm happy that you say I can explain these things with suttas, because sometimes people just put these ideas aside as "Visuddhimagga jhanas". I haven't even read most of the Visuddhimagga, lol. 😊
Thanks for your good questions and neutrality.

I also realized that AN9.35 is a good sutta to show how the texts are general descriptions of practice, that exiting jhāna is implied. Take this:

With the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption. They cultivate, develop, and make much of that foundation, ensuring that it's properly stabilized. They **think**, 'Why don't I, with the giving up of pleasure and pain, and the ending of former happiness and sadness, enter and remain in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness.' Without charging at the third absorption, with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption.

Now, if we read this literally, it says: Third jhāna > thinking > fourth jhāna. But I think most people will agree one can't think in the third jhāna.

So the point of this statement is that they attain third jhāna, exit it, only *then* think, and then go through jhanās 1–3 again before attaining the fourth. The phrase "they cultivate, develop, and make much of that foundation, ensuring that it's properly stabilized" is also the exact same idea as Sariputta's "repeated practice" in MN111, where he exited jhānas before he contemplated them, and then developed the next jhāna by attaining it a number of times.

Similar reflections including thinking continue in AN9.35 up to and including the last two stages. So then, if we're overly literal, the practitioner is also thinking in the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception... Obviously they've exited these states at some point. But, again, that is implied. It doesn't have to be said.

The same is true in the very next sutta, AN9.36, where after each jhāna it also includes a thought, namely:

They turn their mind away from those things, and apply it to the deathless [thinking]: 'This is peaceful; this is sublime—that is, the stilling of all activities, the letting go of all attachments, the ending of craving, fading away, cessation, extinguishment.'

(Well, I know a famous teacher and stirrer of the jhana debate has said you can still think in the 8th "jhāna" ... but they also said they teach different jhānas than the Buddha, so whatever.)

3 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 308 July 18, 2023, 3:53pm

Ceisiwr:

also indicates that insight is developed while one is in the first seven meditative attainments

As far as I can see, that is, as I expected, an argument of the type, “it doesn’t say John came out of bed, so that means he’s having breakfast in bed”.

What determines whether one can contemplate in jhanas is whether the mind can be active enough for that, not just whether you are percipient or not.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 310 July 18, 2023, 4:44pm

Sunyo:

So I’m not sure what [AN9.36](#) is on about.

Having reread AN9.36, I think this is what it is telling us:

- You can get enlightened based on all nine attainments. However, the process will be somewhat different depending on how deep the meditation goes.
- In the first seven attainments there is enough content of awareness, so after you come out you can “contemplate the phenomena there”, included in the aggregates, as “as suffering ... as falling apart” etc.
- Then the Buddha concludes these seven attainments with saying, “that is how (*iti*) there will be penetration to enlightenment as far as the attainments with perception go”. (That is to say, by “contemplating the phenomena there”.)
- However, the process is somewhat different for the attainments with (almost) no perception, because they don’t have enough content to contemplate as suffering. In fact, in the quite similar MN111 Sariputta says there is no escape beyond the cessation of perception, meaning there is no suffering there anymore. So there is also nothing to contemplate as falling apart. Therefore, the way to get enlightened based on these states is not by “contemplating the phenomena there”, but by just attaining them and, when coming back, seeing there was no suffering left (or close to no suffering left).

So, just as Anālayo suggests for MN111, the point being made in AN9.36 is not whether you emerge from all stages or only from the last two; the point is about the content of the attainments.

(And that's more than enough jhāna sutta stuff for today. 🙏)

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 311 July 18, 2023, 7:32pm

When in [AN9.35](#) the Buddha says “a bhikkhu enters and emerges from each of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy”, it seems to me to say you can use any of these states to become enlightened, which is exactly what [AN9.36](#) explains.

Also, the phrase “a bhikkhu enters and emerges from each of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy” is followed by “they become capable of realizing anything that can be realized by insight to which they extend the mind, in each and every case.”

([AN9.35](#)) And that phrase is elsewhere also used after abandoning the hindrances in general, like [AN3.101](#)–102; and [AN5.23](#):

Yes, it seems to me that you can reach Nibbana with just one of these states (with insight, of course).

But, despite this and the other suttas, don't you think that the translation of Venerable Bodhi is also ambiguous as to whether or not the Buddha specifically meant “a person who has attained all 9 jhanas (rather than saying that mastery of a single jhana is sufficient to have psychic powers)” ?

Sunyo:

This reads to me like after the first jhana you already become capable of doing these things.

Interesting! I firmly believed that the first jhana was not enough because of the fact that I always saw psychic powers after this jhana.

By the way, I liked your comparison with John's breakfast. It's true that this kind of reasoning is really tempting sometimes!

For example, DN 2 says this:

“Further, great king, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and grief, the bhikkhu enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is neither pleasant nor painful and contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity. He sits suffusing

his body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his entire body not suffused by a pure bright mind.

“Great king, suppose a man were to be sitting covered from the head down by a white cloth, so that there would be no part of his entire body not suffused by the white cloth. In the same way, great king, the bhikkhu sits suffusing his body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his entire body not suffused by a pure bright mind. This too, great king, is a visible fruit of recluseship more excellent and sublime than the previous ones.

“When his mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He understands thus: ‘This is my body, having material form, composed of the four primary elements, originating from father and mother, built up out of rice and gruel, impermanent, subject to rubbing and pressing, to dissolution and dispersion. And this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it.’

“Great king, suppose there were a beautiful beryl gem of purest water, eight-faceted, well cut, clear, limpid, flawless, endowed with all excellent qualities. And through it there would run a blue, yellow, red, white, or brown thread. A man with keen sight, taking it in his hand, would reflect upon it thus: ‘This is a beautiful beryl gem of purest water, eight faceted, well cut, clear, limpid, flawless, endowed with all excellent qualities. And running through it there is this blue, yellow, red, white, or brown thread.’ In the same way, great king, when his mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright ... the bhikkhu directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision and understands thus: ‘This is my body, having material form and this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it.’ This, too, great king, is a visible fruit of recluseship more excellent and sublime than the previous ones.

It's true that the emergence of jhana before understanding is not explicitly mentioned, but neither is non-emergence. It really tempts me to conclude that insight takes place during jhana, lol. But caution is a very good thing.

This raises the question of having a coherent exegetic-hermeneutic-epistemological system for reading the suttas. Perhaps such a system could help to interpret the suttas with a rigorous, consistent and systematic method, to avoid bias.

Yesterday I watched some videos by Venerable Bodhi about MN 111. He says that when he reads the sutta itself, he gets the impression that you can practice insight while in jhana. However, according to intellectual reasoning, he thinks that one cannot practice insight while in jhana (he thinks one must first emerge from it).

The reasoning is as follows:

To analyze the elements of jhanas one by one, vitakka/vicara must be present in the mind;

However, vitakka/vicara are not present in the mind during jhanas superior to the first;
So we cannot analyze the elements of the jhanas one by one while in jhana.

links :

Sunyo:

Just as a disclaimer, I'm sure I'm not flawless. I may change my mind on some of the details I've shared. 😊

I'm happy that you say I can explain these things with suttas, because sometimes people just put these ideas aside as "Visuddhimagga jhanas". I haven't even read most of the Visuddhimagga, lol. 😊 Thanks for your good questions and neutrality.

Thank you Bhante, you are humble and kind!

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 312 July 18, 2023, 9:00pm

DeadBuddha:

Yesterday I watched some videos by Venerable Bodhi about [MN 111](#). He says that when he reads the sutta itself, he gets the impression that you can practice insight while in jhana. However, according to intellectual reasoning, he thinks that one cannot practice insight while in jhana (he thinks one must first emerge from it).

The reasoning is as follows:

To analyze the elements of jhanas one by one, vitakka/vicara must be present in the mind;
However, vitakka/vicara are not present in the mind during jhanas superior to the first;
So we cannot analyze the elements of the jhanas one by one while in jhana.

A simple reading of the suttas is that insight occurs whilst in Jhana. You don't need V&V for that. Ven. Bodhi I assume thinks they are needed because of the translation of "initial thought and investigation", but in terms of Jhana V&V mean the wholesome intentional thoughts of metta, mudita, contentment etc.

1 Like

[Vaddha](#) 313 July 19, 2023, 12:26am

DeadBuddha:

Perhaps such a system could help to interpret the suttas with a rigorous, consistent and systematic method, to avoid bias.

You've just described the reasoning behind much of the Abhidhamma literature, something every major early Buddhist sect seems to have valued! And they are always biased and disagree vigorously in several points with one another. Everyone is trying to understand the *buddhavacana* to the best of their ability, ideally to put it into practice and realize it for oneself. It's helpful to have the opinions and analyses of knowledgeable people — both ancient and modern — but there is no error-free method.

Mettā 😊

4 Likes

[Upasaka_Dhammasara](#) 314 July 19, 2023, 1:18am

From upanishads

32-40. The first three states are said to be the waking state; the fourth is called the dream state. And the mind dissolves like the fragments of an autumnal cloud. He who reaches the fifth stage survives but as bare being. Due to the dissolution of the mind in this stage the world-manifold does not present itself at all. Reaching the fifth stage called 'deep sleep', the sadhaka remains as pure non-dual being, all particulars having completely vanished. Having reached the fifth stage, one stays consolidated in deep sleep, joyful, inwardly awake, all dual appearances gone. Looking inwards, even when attending to outer things, he appears always indrawn, being extremely exhausted. Practising in this fifth stage, free from all innate impulses, one reaches, as a matter of course, the sixth stage named 'the Fourth'. Where there is neither the non-existent nor the existent, neither the 'I' nor the non-'I', with all analytic thinking gone, one stays alone, totally fearless, in non-duality. Beyond knots, with all doubt vanquished, liberated in life, devoid of imaginations, though unextinguished yet extinguished, he is like a painted flame. Having dwelt in the sixth. stage, he shall reach the seventh. The state of disembodied liberation is called the seventh stage of Yoga.

Forgot the name

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 315 July 19, 2023, 1:36am

DeadBuddha:

don't you think that the translation of Venerable Bodhi is also ambiguous as to whether or not the Buddha specifically meant "*a person who has attained all 9 jhanas (rather than saying that mastery of a single jhana is sufficient to have psychic powers)*" ?

For sake of clarity for those reading along, the translation you're referring to is, "When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu enters and emerges from each of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy." (AN9.35) The question is, does it mean you attain all the attainments, or is one of them enough?

I don't know what Bhikkhu Bodhi had in mind, but if I show you nine mushrooms and say "each of these will kill you when you eat them", to me it doesn't mean you have to eat all nine to die.

The Pali uses *taṃ tad'eva* (= *taṃ taṃ eva*). Elsewhere this is used as a universalization, like here:

Suppose, friends, a king or a royal minister had a wardrobe full of differently coloured clothes. Whatever suit he might want to wear in the morning he would wear in the morning. (SN46.4)

It doesn't mean the king wears all his suits at the same time. (Though generally *taṃ taṃ* is accompanied by the relative *yaṃ yaṃ*, which AN9.35 doesn't have. I'm not sure that makes a huge difference.)

I can see how contextually you could argue it says you need all nine attainments, though, including the cessation of perception. But that doesn't fit too well in the wider scope of the canon, since this would be the only place (that I know of) where that attainment is said to result in a malleable mind. Elsewhere it is always after the jhānas that this happens. No surprise, when the commentary comments on the phrase in AN9.35, it say it refers to the fourth jhāna.

Let's agree it is ambiguous, to not stick with this sentence for too long. Then still, the four jhānas are elsewhere also said to be emerged from, and to be "reviewed".

DeadBuddha:

For example, [DN 2](#) says this:

In that case I think there is actually an indication as to what's going on. It uses a locative absolute with a past participle (*evaṃ samāhite ...*), which indicates something in the past (with a past perfect

sense, meaning something completed). [Wijesekera](#) says in such cases “the loc. absolute is used in a general way to denote the time since or after which some action is supposed to take place.” A similar locative absolute with a past participle is *evam vutte*, meaning “when this was said” (meaning the speaker had finished speaking). When something is going on at the same time, the locative absolute tends to use a present participle, not a past one.

However, the phrase must also be possible to be read differently, otherwise knowledgeable people wouldn't disagree.

But also in this case the insight that follows is phrased as a *thought*: “This body of mine is physical. It's made up of the four primary elements, produced by mother and father, built up from rice and porridge, liable to impermanence, to wearing away and erosion, to breaking up and destruction. And this consciousness of mine is attached to it, tied to it.” Now, then it comes down to whether one believes in the fourth jhana one can think such thoughts. To me, the answer is an absolute ‘no’ already for the first jhana, let alone the fourth.

DeadBuddha:

He says that when he reads the sutta itself, he gets the impression that you can practice insight while in jhana. However, according to intellectual reasoning, he thinks that one cannot practice insight while in jhana (he thinks one must first emerge from it).

Thanks for linking to the timestamps in the video. 😊

I'm happy Bhikkhu Bodhi points out the “as they occurred” in “one by one as they occurred” isn't in the Pali! I assumed that was his idea, but apparently it was Ñāṇamoli's.

Not that it matters a lot, but the way he explains it, it doesn't seem to be just intellectual reasoning. He refers to his own practice. And that is one point I tried to make before, that the way one reads these texts is influenced by one's practice, and that's the way it would have been at the time of the Buddha as well. That's also why I would agree with Vaddha, that we shouldn't approach the suttas just as a textual systematic method.

In my opinion, to those who attained jhānas it will be so clear that you can't contemplate within them, that the sutta can only be read as Sariputta contemplating those phenomena *after* “they disappeared”. (Which, to repeat myself, is indeed when the insight is said to happen.) There is no ambiguity anymore for them. That's why the suttas don't need to explicitly mention emerging from the jhānas all the time.

On top of that, I think emerging after the jhana is left unmentioned in such suttas because it is a natural process, not something the meditator does. It is determined by how much letting go they do when entering the jhāna, not determined while they are in the jhāna.

Either way, I think I've given some quite strong examples where emergence is clearly implied without being stated explicitly, in particular SN28.1. I see no reason that this wouldn't be similarly implied in suttas like MN111.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 316 July 19, 2023, 3:05am

Sunyo:

Let me know what I'm getting wrong. If it's just the word *eva*, then that might indeed be interpreted differently, as Sujato seems to do, because it is used in different senses. But considering context, with the cessation of certain perceptions (which are sensual) and the arising of other perceptions, which is "a subtle but true perception" of *pītisukha* (which is mental) the overall idea seems pretty clear to me.

My apologies on this one. I was mis-remembering. It was *ekā* that Bhante's post referred to

Though I don't disagree with your view of the unitariness of perception in *jhāna*, I don't think DN 9 offers very strong support for it. It really only works with Ajahn Thanissaro's translation, which is based on the reading in the Royal Siamese Tipiṭaka where the two verbs happen to be in the singular:

Sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjati, sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhati.

Thanissaro wrote: "With training, one perception arises and with training another perception ceases."

Every other translator, however, has favoured the reading found in the Sinhalese edition (and in all editions of the Dīgha Commentary), where the two verbs are plural:

Sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjanti, sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhanti.

Thomas Rhys Davids wrote: "By training some ideas arise. By training others pass away."

Sujāto wrote: "With training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease."

Maurice Walshe wrote: "Some perceptions arise through training, and some pass away through training."

Dhammānando wrote: "Owing to the training certain perceptions occur; owing to the training certain perceptions cease."

Thomas Trätow wrote: "Durch Übung entstehen gewisse bewusste Wahrnehmungen, durch Übung vergehen gewisse bewusste Wahrnehmungen."

Kåre A. Lie wrote: "Noen tanker oppstår som følge av trening, andre tanker stopper som følge av trening."

Even if we grant that Thanissaro is right to favour the Royal Siamese reading, there's still the question of whether he has translated it properly. Frankly I don't think he has. The Pali word *eka*, outside of compounds, is much much more often used as a limiting adjective than as a numeral. For example, *eko piḥako* would more probably mean "a certain dungbeetle" than "one dungbeetle". Most translators would opt for the second rendering only if the context clearly indicated that *eko* was being used as a numeral (e.g., if the passage was a description of somebody counting dung-beetles).

Even the Thai translators, who like Thanissaro use the Royal Siamese edition, don't render the passage in the way that he does. They translate *ekā saññā* as "a certain kind of perception" (สัญญาอย่างหนึ่ง), not as "one perception" (สัญญาหนึ่ง).

[How long to attain first jhana? - Page 4 - Dhamma Wheel Buddhist Forum](#)

Looking at the Pāli for DN 9 it's interesting that we have repetitions, but one with "eva" and one without

***Vivekajapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññī tasmim samaye hoti,
vivekajapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññīyeve tasmim samaye hoti.***

I'm not sure why this is. Do you have any ideas Bhante? I looked at the parallel for some clues but it was missing there

13. "Suppose a Tathāgata arises in the world, an Arhat and Completely Awakened One who possesses the ten epithets. Someone leaves home for the path in the Buddha's Dharma ... ceases the five hindrances that obscure their mind. They abandon desires and bad and

unskillful things. With perception and examination, that seclusion gives rise to joy and happiness, and they enter the first dhyāna.

14. “Their prior notions of desire cease, and notions of joy and happiness arise. Wanderer, we know because of this that there are causes and conditions for conceptions to arise, and cause and condition for conceptions to cease.
15. “That person ceases having perception or examination. They have an inner joy and unified mind without perception or examination. That samādhi gives rise to joy and happiness, and they enter the second dhyāna.

[The Long Discourses | 28. \[Potṭhapāda\] \(dharmapearls.net\)](#)

That first post indeed says they abandoned the hindrances, but not that they attained jhana. You can abandon the hindrances without entering jhāna, because there is another thing you have to do, which is to become fully separated from kāmā (sensory experiences)". In fact, that this sutta specifically says “while walking” one abandons the hindrances but does NOT mentions jhāna or abandoning sensory experiences, I think speaks in favor of the non-bodily interpretation of jhana. I’d say it purposefully leaves “separated from sensory experiences” out, it and only mentions abandoning the hindrances, the latter of which I agree one can do while walking.

Bhante Sujato has stated samādhi has a broader meaning than jhānas as well, see Swift Pair of Messengers. So has Ānālayo, and I think most everybody, actually.

For a recap I was referring to this sutta

Suppose a mendicant has got rid of desire and ill will while walking, and has given up dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. Their energy is roused up and unflagging, their mindfulness is established and lucid, their body is tranquil and undisturbed, and their mind is immersed in samādhi. Such a mendicant is said to be ‘keen and prudent, always energetic and determined’ when walking.

Carato cepi, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno abhijjhābyāpādo vigato hoti, thinamiddham ...
uddhaccakukkuccaṃ ... vicikicchā pahīnā hoti, āraddham hoti vīriyaṃ asallīnaṃ, upaṭṭhitā sati
asammutṭhā, passaddho kāyo asāraddho, samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ, carampi, bhikkhave,
bhikkhu evambhūto ‘ātāpī ottāpī satataṃ samitaṃ āraddhavīriyo pahitatto’ti vuccati.

[AN 4.12](#)

Now I do doubt your claim that samādhi sometimes doesn’t refer to jhāna (I also re-read Sujato’s book but couldn’t find anything, but I was skimming) but I don’t think that entirely matters here (although I’m happy to go over that too). There are occasions where it talks of the Signless etc, but

those are clearly stated. Whilst walking, a mendicant has abandoned the hindrances. He is practicing Satipaṭṭhāna. When one abandons the hindrances through Satipaṭṭhāna then jhāna occurs, and so the samādhi here is referring to jhāna. This is bolstered by the phrase *“Their energy is roused up and unflagging, their mindfulness is established and lucid, their body is tranquil and undisturbed, and their mind is immersed in samādhi.”* We see this stock phrase occur with the awakening factors, for example

“Mendicants, when a mendicant is accomplished in ethics, immersion, knowledge, freedom, or the knowledge and vision of freedom, even the sight of them is very helpful, I say. Even to hear them, approach them, pay homage to them, recollect them, or go forth following them is very helpful, I say. Why is that? Because after hearing the teaching of such mendicants, a mendicant will live withdrawn in both body and mind, as they recollect and think about that teaching.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of mindfulness; they develop it and perfect it. As they live mindfully in this way they investigate, explore, and inquire into that teaching with wisdom.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of investigation of principles; they develop it and perfect it. As they investigate principles with wisdom in this way their energy is roused up and unflagging.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of energy; they develop it and perfect it. When they're energetic, rapture not of the flesh arises.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of rapture; they develop it and perfect it. When the mind is full of rapture, the body and mind become tranquil.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of tranquility; they develop it and perfect it. When the body is tranquil and one feels bliss, the mind becomes immersed in samādhi.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of immersion; they develop it and perfect it. They closely watch over that mind immersed in samādhi.

At such a time, a mendicant has activated the awakening factor of equanimity; they develop it and perfect it.

SN 46.3

All in all then it does look like Jhāna is occurring whilst walking, during Satipaṭṭhāna. Satipaṭṭhāna is both an insight practice and a samatha practice. One can imagine a monk walking back and forth in the charnel ground, contemplating the corpses and his own body (the "internally and externally of Satipaṭṭhāna) which leads to the abandoning of the hindrances and the steadying of the mind

until it is fully collected, i.e. jhāna. I also quite like this sutta for its mention of the need for bodily and mental seclusion (kāyavūpakāśena ca cittavūpakāśena ca).

I'm not sure exactly how this relates to the question whether jhānas are bodily states or not, but perhaps you are referring to the wider use of kāya, going beyond just 'physical body'. Indeed, you're right, the word kāya has a much wider meaning than just physical body. But at times it also goes beyond *any* aspects of the body. Among other things, it also can refer to the person more generally, just like we say 'somebody'.

In the third jhāna "by the kāya" (kāyena) means "by the person", i.e. "personally":

And with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, **personally** (kāyena) experiencing the bliss of **which the noble ones declare**, 'Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.'

The point is, one *personally* experiences the sukha one has heard about from the noble ones before

Whilst kāyena can be used idiomatically, and kāya can mean the whole person (body and mind) why must we read it this way when it comes to the Jhānas? Given the scheme laid out in the Indriyasamūyutta, which discusses sukha in relation to the Jhānas, doesn't it make more sense that the physical body is meant there?

Katamañca, bhikkhave, sukhindriyaṃ? Yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, kāyikaṃ sukhaṃ, kāyikaṃ sātaṃ, kāyasamphassaṃ sukhaṃ sātaṃ vedayitaṃ— idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, sukhindriyaṃ
And what is the faculty of pleasure? Physical enjoyment, physical pleasure, the enjoyable, pleasant feeling that's born from physical contact. This is called the faculty of pleasure.

Katamañca, bhikkhave, somanassindriyaṃ? Yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, cetasikaṃ sukhaṃ, cetasikaṃ sātaṃ, manasamphassaṃ sukhaṃ sātaṃ vedayitaṃ— daṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, somanassindriyaṃ.
And what is the faculty of happiness? Mental enjoyment, mental pleasure, the enjoyable, pleasant feeling that's born from mind contact. This is called the faculty of happiness. - SN 48.38

Here sukha is bodily ease. Somanassa is mental pleasure, which has its basis in the emotion of rapture (pīti). Tranquillity seems to be the cause for the sukha, following the unfolding of the awakening factors. It would make sense that a tranquil body would feel sukha, ease, no? This brings me onto another point you have raised

It can't be the body that feels the pīti and sukha, because in the suttas the pīti that is felt in the first two jhānas is repeatedly called mental (pīti-māna). It's similar with the sukha, which is called non-physical (nirāmisa) and in other ways is indicated to be mental. For example, it is

said in [MN139](#) that the sukha that comes from the body (and other physical senses) is not to be developed, and that one should seek sukha “internally”, i.e. in the mind.

In the Nirāmisā sutta (SN 36.31) we find that based on the kāmaguṇa (nirāmisā) there is rapture (pīti) as well as mental and physical pleasure (sukha & somanassa). Sukha here can only be physical not mental, since that is covered by “somanassa”. Next we are told that spiritual (sāmisa) rapture (pīti) and spiritual pleasure (sukha) arise with their respective Jhānas. Note that somanassa (mental pleasure) is missing. Somanassa crops up again though later on

Katamañca, bhikkhave, nirāmisā nirāmisataraṃ sukhaṃ? Yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, khīṇāsavassa bhikkhuno rāgā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, dosā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato, mohā cittaṃ vimuttaṃ paccavekkhato uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, nirāmisā nirāmisataraṃ sukhaṃ. And what is pleasure even more spiritual than that not of the flesh? When a mendicant who has ended the defilements reviews their mind free from greed, hate, and delusion, pleasure and happiness arises. This is called pleasure even more spiritual than that not of the flesh.

Here we have somanassa and sukha arising for a liberated one, reviewing their attainments. Once again since somanassa is mentioned, sukha has to be physical. We have then a non-material bodily ease arising. This would mean that the use of "Nirāmisā" can't be used to argue that sukha must be mental. Now notice that throughout sukha is physical in this sutta. Somanassa is missing from the discussion of Jhāna, but I see no reason why the sutta would suddenly switch the meaning to “somanassa” here. Since rapture is also discussed, I would take somanassa to be covered by it during Jhāna, and so sukha here means physical ease just like the Nirāmisā sukha is physical for the liberated Arahant. This would also match the parallel versions of SN 48.40, where somanassa ends with rapture ceasing. Within Jhāna then the mental pleasure (somanassa) is caused by rapture, and so sukha must refer to bodily ease (caused by tranquillity). As mentioned before, the commentaries also explain it this way.

As far as I can see, that is, as I expected, an argument of the type, “it doesn't say John came out of bed, so that means he's having breakfast in bed”.

What determines whether one can contemplate in jhanas is whether the mind can be active enough for that, not just whether you are percipient or not.

That isn't the argument I'm making. What is the Jhāna sutta discussing? It is discussing how liberation occurs. This occurs when there is perception. The sutta then makes a distinction between the Jhānas + the first 3 formless attainments and nevasaññānāsaññāyatana & nirodha-samāpatti (Neither-perception-nor-non-perception & Cessation of Perception & Feeling). When discussing nevasaññānāsaññāyatana & nirodha-samāpatti it says one can only have insight when one has entered and left them. The comparison then is that with the other attainments, you don't need to enter and leave them in order for there to be insight. You just need to enter them. You mentioned

that one needs to actually see their cessation in order to see impermanence, but how true is that? I can see the impermanence of my body without it having actually died no? After all “impermanence” is just a concept, a perception, that we apply to experience. Its not some thing you actually cognise.

“When his mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He understands thus: ‘This is my body, having material form, composed of the four primary elements, originating from father and mother, built up out of rice and gruel, impermanent, subject to rubbing and pressing, to dissolution and dispersion. And this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it.’ - DN 2

In my opinion, to those who attained jhānas it will be so clear that you can’t contemplate within them, that the sutta can only be read as Sariputta contemplating those phenomena *after* “they disappeared”. (Which, to repeat myself, is indeed when the insight is said to happen.) There is no ambiguity anymore for them. That’s why the suttas don’t need to explicitly mention emerging from the jhānas all the time.

There has been however a long history of Buddhist traditions teaching that you can contemplate whilst in jhāna, most of them no longer around today.

To recap my points:

- Satipaṭṭhāna is both an insight and samatha practice, and can be done whilst in Jhāna.
- Samādhi means Jhāna, unless otherwise stated.
- You can walk and gain insight whilst in a Jhāna.
- Whilst in Jhāna there is mental pleasure (somanassa) arising from rapture, and physical ease (sukha) arising from physical tranquillity.
- In order to enter Jhāna you need physical seclusion (kāyavūpakāśena) away from sensual pleasures (kāma) and mental seclusion (cittavūpakāśena) from the hindrances.
- Whilst in Jhāna your perception of the body will change, as it begins to take on the subtle form of the devas in the corresponding realms.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 317 July 19, 2023, 10:30am

Thank you for explaining the discussion to the others readers!

Sunyo:

I don't know what Bhikkhu Bodhi had in mind, but if I show you nine mushrooms and say "each of these will kill you when you eat them", to me it doesn't mean you have to eat all nine to die.

Interesting, but for example if I say "When a person takes each of these coins, he becomes able to buy bread", that gives the opposite impression. It seems that, depending on the examples we give, the "prejudices" we have about how the situations described work can make us lean towards one interpretation rather than another. We have to try to read these examples without prejudice - and that's not easy.

For example, let me take your example and make it fit the Venerable Bodhi sentence.

Venerable Bodhi writes: "When, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu enters and emerges from each of these meditative attainments, his mind becomes malleable and wieldy."

Modifying your example a little, I get: "When a person swallows each of these mushrooms, the person becomes ill".

Let's put aside our prejudices about the situation where someone eats mushrooms, and look at the sentence for itself to understand its meaning. Well, personally, I find it ambiguous.

I'm sorry I came back to that sentence, but it sounded very interesting.

Sunyo:

In that case I think there is actually an indication as to what's going on.

That's interesting. You know Pali 10,000 times better than I do.

To clarify the discussion for the readers, let me imitate you bhante by reminding them that you are talking here about this passage from DN 2 :

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it and project it toward knowledge and vision.

So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñjappatte nāṇadassanāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti.

Please venerable Sunyo, I have a question. In the case where we consider that this mental state of the fourth jhana is already completed (because of the pali), this implies that the fourth jhana has the characteristics of "pliable" and "workable". How do you interpret these two words?

Some people say that non-corporeal jhanas are fixed because they are immobilized on an object of

attention at one point (and it would be precisely this fixed aspect that brings great detachment and peace). If this is true, it gives me the impression that jhana is not flexible and malleable. But I feel that there is something that escapes my understanding.

Sunyo:

Now, then it comes down to whether one believes in the fourth jhana one can think such thoughts. To me, the answer is an absolute 'no' already for the first jhana, let alone the fourth.

Perhaps these "thoughts" are not "verbal thoughts" but rather a kind of "subtle non-verbal understanding"? But then this has to do with our interpretation of vitakka and vicara.

By the way, I'd like to say that there are regularly parts of your messages that I don't reply to because they teach me so much but I don't know what to say, so thank you again for all this information!

[DeadBuddha](#) 318 July 19, 2023, 11:16am

Ceisiwr:

You mentioned that one needs to actually see their cessation in order to see impermanence, but how true is that? I can see the impermanence of my body without it having actually died no? After all "impermanence" is just a concept, a perception, that we apply to experience. Its not some thing you actually cognise.

Venerable Analayo has [argued](#) this (p.121-122), if you're interested :

To cultivate such awareness of these mental qualities arising and disappearing while being in an absorption is impossible, because the very presence of these qualities is required for there to be an absorption in the first place and for it to continue being a state of absorption.

The formulation used in the discourse makes it clear that the passage does not intend to refer to the momentary change of mental qualities. The Anupada-sutta clearly specifies that Sāriputta observes the arising of mental qualities which "have not been, come into being", ahutvā sambhonti, and he contemplates their disappearance when "having been, they disappear", hutvā paṭiventi. The notion of momentariness, according to which phenomena pass away on the spot at every moment, is in fact a relatively late development in Buddhist thought. It can safely be set aside as not forming the backdrop of the early discourses.

So when these states have not yet come into being or disappear, a practitioner inevitably

is not yet or no longer in the absorption, simply because the absorption lasts only as long as all of the mental qualities that characterize it are fully present.

Therefore to observe the arising of these mental qualities and their disappearance could only happen before an absorption is attained or after the attainment has come to an end.

1 Like

[Sunyo](#) 319 July 19, 2023, 1:51pm

Ceisiwr:

My apologies on this one. I was mis-remembering. It was *ekā* that Bhante's post referred to

No problem. 😊 I also apologize if anything I said has been incorrect or misremembered, which I'm sure must have been the case at some points in this long discussion.

Ceisiwr:

Looking at the Pāli for [DN 9](#) it's interesting that we have repetitions, but one with "eva" and one without

*Vivekajapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññā tasmim samaye hoti,
vivekajapītisukhasukhumasaccasaññīyeva tasmim samaye hoti.*

I'm not sure why this is. Do you have any ideas Bhante?

The word *eva* may not mean much, to be fair. Sometimes it definitely means 'only', but exactly when can be hard to tell. But I think it makes contextual sense to translate it this way here, since we're talking about perceptions ceasing and another being present. (Notice the verb here is surely singular in all editions, *hoti*.)

It also seems like the word *eva* is the only meaningful difference between the two statements, from which I conclude it may mean something more than just an emphasis. Otherwise there's little use to restate the same thing.

But it seems I'm the only one to translate it that way here, so I'll reconsider. It's not that my interpretation stands or falls based on that word alone, anyway.

It's about the passage as a whole, which sounds to me much more like withdrawing from the five senses than withdrawing into a hut or forest. For example, it says that the sensual perceptions cease

at the moment one enters first jhāna, just like perception of *pīti* ends at the moment one enters the third jhāna. This doesn't seem to refer to going into physical seclusion, which is usually done long before abandoning the hindrances and entering jhāna.

Let me quote the passage once more, for clarity:

When they get fully separated from sensory experiences and separated from unskillful states of mind, they attain the first jhana, where there is delight and bliss (*sukha*) caused by the separation [from the sensory experiences], to which the mind moves and holds on. The perception of sensory experiences which they had before, ceases. At that time there is subtle but true perception of delight and bliss caused by the separation, and they only have that perception, subtle but true, of delight and bliss caused by the separation. That is how through training some perceptions [of the five senses] cease while others [of *pītisukha*] arise.

The thing abandoned in the first jhāna is also called a 'perception', just like the feeling of *pītisukha* is called a perception. Walking into seclusion doesn't really make certain "perceptions" cease, I would say, at least not in the same way the perception of *pīti* ceases in the third jhāna. However, the cessation of sounds, smells, and so on, is cessation in very much the same sense. (To pre-empt possible responses by others, I know in some other places *kāmasaññā* means perceptions of sense desire, but I don't think that's the case here in DN9.)

Elsewhere "fully separated from sensual objects (*kāmā*)" is also explained as "one has thoroughly ended sensual objects (*kāmā*)". (AN9.33) That *also* doesn't sound like withdrawing into the forest to me. By walking into a forest, you don't really *thoroughly end* the "sensual objects"; you just move away from them. However, in my view of jhāna, sounds, sights, smells, etc, *do* actually thoroughly come to an end.

Ceisiwr:

Now I do doubt your claim that *samādhi* sometimes doesn't refer to jhāna (I also re-read Sujato's book but couldn't find anything, but I was skimming)

I don't feel like discussing this here, and you were also happy to let it go, so I'll just refer to others. Sujato's discussion starts on [page 16](#), and [here](#) are Anālayo's thoughts.

Ceisiwr:

When one abandons the hindrances through Satipaṭṭhāna then jhāna occurs

Well, that's exactly where we disagree, isn't it? 😊 [As I said](#), I think one needs to do something else too, namely withdrawing the mind from the five senses. That's why there are two prerequisites for

attaining the first jhāna in the standard formula, not one. Another argument is, if you only needed to abandon the unskillful qualities, the enlightened ones would always be in jhāna, because all unskillful qualities depend on ignorance (SN20.1).

Ceisiwr:

Given the scheme laid out in the Indriyasamyutta, which discusses sukha in relation to the Jhānas, doesn't it make more sense that the physical body is meant there? [...] Here sukha is bodily ease.

That's how sukha-indriya is defined there, yes. But [as discussed before](#), it is said in SN48.40 that this kind of sukha (bodily sukha) does *not* exist in the third jhāna! So the sukha that exists in the third jhāna must be a different kind of sukha, which is mental. Therefore, it can't be felt "with the body" ("kāyena").

Ceisiwr:

It would make sense that a tranquil body would feel sukha, ease, no?

It does make sense on some level, and I used to think of it like that too. But I think the practice goes much deeper than just bodily relaxation. I take this to mean your body becomes so tranquil you can't feel it anymore. That happens because you focus on the pīti (which is mental), being no longer interested in the body. Then the mind feels the ease (sukha) of not having that burden of the body anymore, the ease of being away from the senses.

(It's good news for those in chronic pain: the body can also be tranquilized in this way if it is in pain. To attain jhānas the pain fades away into the background; it doesn't need to be transformed into bodily pleasure, which sometimes just isn't feasible. Also good news for quadriplegics, who, not being able to feel the body, can't attain the bodily jhānas of some interpretations.)

Some Chinese parallels also say that both body *and* mind become tranquil at this point, not just the body.

Ceisiwr:

Next we are told that spiritual (sāmisa) [I suppose you mean *nirāmisa*] rapture (pīti) and spiritual pleasure (sukha) arise with their respective Jhānas.

Exactly, it's *spiritual* (or literally "not of the flesh"), which [means](#), "relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things", synonyms being 'psychological', 'inner', and 'non-material'. To avoid confusion, I prefer to translate *nirāmisa* following Cone and Digital Pali Dictionary as 'non-physical'. PED and Buddhadatta also have 'non-material'.

What I'm saying is, pleasure felt "with the body" is **not** spiritual, not *nirāmisā*. That's what *Sāmisā* means, "of the flesh", i.e. "of the body". (As in Matthew 26:41: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh (body) is weak.")

We also have to be consistent when possible. If *nirāmisā pīti* is a mental emotion, as you seem to agree (and which is hard to deny since it's called *pīti-māna*), then *nirāmisā sukha* must also be a mental emotion.

Ceisiwr:

Once again since *somanassa* is mentioned, *sukha* has to be physical.

No, here the two are definitely synonymous. Notice that in *uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ* the verb *uppajjati* is singular, which means that one thing arises, not two separate ones. You can see a peculiarity in Sujato's translation, where subject and verb don't agree in number: "pleasure and happiness arises". The word "and" isn't there in Pali, that's the thing. More literally it says: "[there] arises *sukha*, which is *somanassa*". The two words are attributes to one another, not different things.

Ceisiwr:

The comparison [in AN9.36] then is that with the other attainments, you don't need to enter and leave them in order for there to be insight.

I got your line of reasoning already, but I don't find it satisfying. I'm not sure whether you saw my [later post](#) when you typed this. So to clarify, I think the essential comparison being made is much more pragmatic than that, and also more directly related to the central theme of the sutta, which is how the nine attainments are a basis for enlightenment, not whether one becomes enlightened inside of them or not.

The comparison being made is *how* you contemplate these states. When it comes to the last two attainments you can't "contemplate the phenomena there", because there just are not enough "phenomena" there. So when the Buddha says, "thus there is penetration to final knowledge as far as meditative attainments accompanied by perception", the word "thus" means "in that way" — which is to say, penetration occurs in the way he just described for the attainments with perception, namely through analyzing "the phenomena there". But it's different for the final two.

The sutta doesn't actually say the penetration to enlightenment happens *inside* the first seven attainments. That is something added on through interpretation, including in that article you linked, which is why I still think it makes a "John had breakfast in bed"-type argument. (There should be a better name for this! 'Appeal to ignorance', I believe is the name, claiming something is

true because of something not being said. That is to say, “It isn’t said one comes out of jhana, therefore one doesn’t come out of jhana.”)

I mean, it’s true that the sutta only mentions having to be skilled in entering and emergence for the last two attainments. But does this therefore mean one doesn’t have to be skilled in these things for the prior attainments? I don’t think so. Elsewhere these skills are said to be important for developing *all* attainments of samādhi including the jhānas. A whole book in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, SN34, is all about these skills. There’s also SN52.21, AN2.163, AN6.64, AN6.72, AN7.40–41, and more. Suffice to say, the idea isn’t exactly marginal! 😊 And I think these skills are also implied in this sutta (AN9.36) for *all* nine states, especially because they are said to lead to enlightenment, which implies people are already skilled in these things.

Ceisiwr:

You mentioned that one needs to actually see their cessation in order to see impermanence, but how true is that?

It’s somewhat off topic, but I think that is very true, at least if we’re talking about enlightenment. The body’s impermanence is obvious if one gives it a second of thought, one doesn’t need jhana for that. But if one wants to understand impermanence of the aggregates/senses, on deep level that leads to awakening, something beyond the intellect, then one needs to see them cease. Two suttas earlier, in AN9.34, this is also explained with respect to dukkha using the jhānas. To understand for example how pīti in the third jhāna is “an affliction” (same word as mentioned in AN9.36), one needs to go beyond it (e.g. attain fourth jhāna) and then have it come back again. Through impermanence one understands suffering. The absence of a self can also be understood through seeing things cease. (E.g. MN148) Example: if the five senses cease in the first jhāna, you’ll be able to acknowledge deeply that they are anattā.

Anyway, that is only a tangential argument for the insights in AN9.36 to happen after the jhānas. My main argument is that it is not specifically mentioned to happen inside the jhānas (nor is this the case anywhere else). But there are other suttas where the person clearly comes out of jhāna at some point, yet emergence also isn’t mentioned there. Emergence is always implied, is what I’m saying.

Ceisiwr:

There has been however a long history of Buddhist traditions teaching that you can contemplate whilst in jhāna, most of them no longer around today.

Probably so. These disputes go back to the earliest days of Buddhism. Which is interesting in its own right, but I won’t diverge. 😊

2 Likes

[Sunyo](#) 320 July 19, 2023, 1:52pm

DeadBuddha:

That's interesting. You know Pali 10,000 times better than I do.

Unfortunately, some people who disagree with me know Pāli at least as well as I do. 😊

DeadBuddha:

If this is true, it gives me the impression that jhana is not flexible and malleable. But I feel that there is something that escapes my understanding.

When the mind has attained the fourth jhana (or any jhana), it emerges (i.e. the jhana is as you say "completed"), then the mind becomes pliable and malleable. That's because of the after-effect of jhana, which removes the hindrances for a long time. I wish the suttas said it clearer, but anyway, I'll revert to my argument that it would have been abundantly clear to those who attained the jhānas.

DeadBuddha:

Perhaps these "thoughts" are not "verbal thoughts" but rather a kind of "subtle non-verbal understanding"? But then this has to do with our interpretation of vitakka and vicara.

Well, they may not be verbal, but then they are still thoughts, is what I would argue. I don't think there is a significant difference between verbal and non-verbal thoughts. But let's not go there...

Coming back to AN9.35, I could also argue, if your object of focus changes from pītisukha to nibbāna, then you're definitely no longer in jhāna. Because the perception of pītisukha then ceases, meaning you're no longer in jhāna. As the text says: "*They turn their mind away from those things* [the phenomena in the jhāna], and apply it to the deathless." This means, in my opinion, they turn their minds away from *reviewing* the jhāna experience and project it towards nibbāna. And I'm arguing, if one thinks one contemplates these phenomena *inside* jhāna, then the sutta still says one turns one's minds away from those phenomena, meaning the jhāna has ceased. And only then does enlightenment happen. So no matter how we interpret it, you don't become enlightened inside jhāna.

So that's three reasons in this sutta alone that the reflections happen outside jhāna: there are thoughts there, one turns one's mind away from the phenomena, and one contemplates the "falling apart" of these things. I mean, that's why it doesn't need to be explicitly said that one emerges from jhāna. It would've been clear from context.

And it would have been clear to people who attained these states. In AN5.27 it is said that if one develops samādhi, the knowledge automatically arises that, "I mindfully enter into and emerge from this immersion." This knowledge everybody who attained a jhāna will have, and it will be obvious what this implies. (This sutta precedes AN5.28 which talks about reviewing jhānas.)

But, lovely people, I said a few days ago that I was going to leave this topic, and I failed. And that's your fault! because you all had such nice and interesting things to say. It was a respectful discussion, and that's good, because without respect one can't practice samādhi (AN5.22).

But second time is a charm, and I'm leaving now. I might be back after the rains to see if more interesting things have been said.

A final word. In SN16.13 it is said the dhamma will disappear when counterfeit dhamma appears in the world. It happens when people "lack respect and reverence for" certain things. And only one factor of the path is mentioned: samādhi. In my opinion, the bodily jhāna interpretations are a lack of reverence for how powerful the mind is, not respecting how deep it can go; and how deep it *needs* to go in order to see the dhamma. What, samādhi is at the very end of the path! but people claim these things are rather ordinary states. I think that's very dangerous for the continuance of our Teacher's dispensation, especially if people start actively discouraging the absorption jhānas, which is why I care about this topic.

Be well everybody. Sukhī hotu. 🙌🥰

5 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 321 July 19, 2023, 3:11pm

Thank you very much Venerable for your great generosity, your patience, your kindness and the quality of your arguments. I hope your vassa will be as fruitful as possible.

May the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha be revered for a long, long time.

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 322 July 19, 2023, 3:13pm

Ceisiwr:

There has been however a long history of Buddhist traditions teaching that you can contemplate whilst in jhāna, most of them no longer around today.

Interesting, please can you say more about these teachers, their current, etc? I'm very intrigued by this, as I had the impression that it was something relatively recent.

[Raftafarian](#) 323 July 19, 2023, 11:29pm

Brahmali:

Raftafarian:

I take it that this non-dual state is the state described to Bahiya in [Ud 1.10](#), a non-duality where there is no subject-object dualism?

No this is different. This is about insight into nonself.

By insight I take it you mean “panna”. The question becomes what does panna mean in this case. I believe and will point to an argument that in this case panna means direct knowledge aka bare awareness. That is sensory input unmediated by sanna.

But first, I am not alone in this interpretation. Bhante Analayo comes to the conclusion in his paper “The Bāhiya Instruction and Bare Awareness” that

Bare awareness does after all appear to have a place in accounts of early Buddhist meditation. In the satipatthāna scheme this place comes into its own alongside a comprehensive exploration of the contemplated phenomena from internal and external perspectives and insight into their nature of arising and passing away. Building on these aspects of the practice, one of the modalities of satipatthāna meditation can then be the cultivation of mindfulness just for the sake of being mindful. The terminology

employed in this instruction recurs in an exposition by Maluḥkyaputta of an injunction, also given to Bāhiya, **to remain with bare awareness of sense experience. Such practice is, according to the Pāli discourses and their parallels, clearly invested with the potential of leading to awakening.**

When the Buddha says “in the seen is only the seen, etc...” that sure does sound like what Analayo calls “bare awareness of sense experience”.

So how does panna mean direct knowledge or bare awareness?

There is an argument for this a paper that has been discussed in this forum before [“Kosalan Philosophy in the Kāṇva Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and the Suttanipāta”](#).

I am not going to go over the whole argument. You can read it in the paper. Its chapter seven. But he does say

Chapter seven formulates the second principle of Kosalan philosophy highlighted in this dissertation, namely two distinct modes of knowing. The chapter starts by exploring Yājñavalkya’s salt analogy in the Kāṇva Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, in which prajñāna is contrasted with saṃjñā in an emerging, not yet fixed reconceptualization of the term ātman. Then it looks at how the corresponding concepts paññā and saññā are used in the Suttanipāta. **The chapter argues that prajñāna and paññā as articulated in the salt analogy of the Kāṇva recension and in the Suttanipāta refer to a mode of direct knowing (pra+√jñā) that is not mediated by past karma, whereas saṃjñā or saññā refers to a mode of composite knowing (sam+√jñā) that perceives reality in conjunction with karmic retribution.**

The following links support his assertion of the meaning of [samjna](#) and [prajna](#) as compound knowing and direct knowing or before knowing/perception.

The Sanskrit word प्रज्ञ (Prajña) is the combination of “प्र (pra-)” which prefix means - **before**, forward, fulfiller, and used as the intensifier but rarely as a separate word [1] and “ज्ञ (jna)” which means - **knowing** or familiar with. [2] प्रज्ञ

sam

सम्

Ind. A particle and prefix implying:-

1. Union, junction, (with, together.)
2. Assemblage, collection.

Bare knowledge is direct knowledge of no ego. The ego is constructed during perception samjna/sanna therefore it is not present in prajna/panna. That is why Snp 4.14 says

“Without normal perception or distorted perception;
 “Na saññasaññī na visaññasaññī,
 not lacking perception, nor perceiving what has disappeared.
 Nopi asaññī na vibhūtasaññī;
 Form disappears for one proceeding thus;
 Evañ sametassa vibhoti rūpañ,
 for **concepts of identity due to proliferation spring from perception.**”
 Saññānidānā hi papañcasāṅkhā”.

This hard to read verse is just talking about bare awareness/direct knowledge of the sensory input. Note: I believe that vibhūtasaññī means perception of void or nothingness here. Bare sensory input is required since it is not lacking perception, nor perceiving void. Obviously, sanna has ceased given the first line.

So yes, there is panna/insight of no ego/self and that is accomplished via bare awareness or direct knowledge of sensory input.

There cannot be subject object dualism without an ego to be the subject.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 324 July 20, 2023, 9:32am

Raftafarian:

By insight I take it you mean “panna”. The question becomes what does panna mean in this case. I believe and will point to an argument that in this case panna means direct knowledge aka bare awareness. That is sensory input unmediated by sanna.

I read “panna” as “understanding”.

The following links support his assertion of the meaning of [samjna](#) and [prajna](#) as compound

knowing and direct knowing or before knowing/perception.

That's Sanskrit though, and a Brahmin use of it. You can't necessarily arrive at the meaning of a Buddhist Pali word by looking at Sanskrit. You have to look at the Pali and how the word is actually used to get the meaning.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 325 July 20, 2023, 9:35am

Raftafarian:

So yes, there is panna/insight of no ego/self and that is accomplished via bare awareness or direct knowledge of sensory input.

There cannot be subject object dualism without an ego to be the subject.

The Buddha would have still thought "I am hungry". He still then would have thought in dualistic terms, because language is dualistic.

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 326 July 20, 2023, 12:15pm

Does anyone know from direct sources whether Ajahn Chah taught that there can or cannot be any reflection, thought, or insight during jhana?

This is not a challenge to the assertion that these cannot take place during jhana.
Just curious as what Ajahn Chah said, assuming such information is available.

1 Like

[Jimh](#) 327 July 21, 2023, 12:12pm

This paper by [Bhikkhu Gunaratana - Should we come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā?](#) presents a perspective on practicing Jhāna with mindfulness based upon the suttas.

Some key points:

Can Jhānic concentration penetrate things as they really are? Do we have to come out of Jhāna in order to practice Vipassanā? Is concentration the same as absorption? If Jhānic concentration is the same as being absorbed by our object of focus then yes, we must leave Jhāna to practice Vipassanā. But, when we become absorbed into our object of focus, what we are practicing is “wrong” Jhāna. When we practice “right” Jhāna we will be able to see things as they really are.

When we read how the Buddha used his own fourth Jhānic concentration, as described in many Suttas, we have no reason to believe that he came out of Jhāna to develop the three kinds of knowledge—knowledge of seeing the past, knowledge of seeing beings dying and taking rebirth, and knowledge of the destruction of defilements. The Buddha used the fourth Jhāna for Vipassanā.

The Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta [MN 77] clearly expresses that the meditator, even in very refined states of Jhāna, sees and knows what it is going on in his mind. *The verbs in the Sutta are used in the present tense not in the past tense.* The Sutta states clearly what the meditator sees and knows while he is in the Jhāna state. If he were to see and know these things after emerging from meditation the Sutta would have used the past tense.

It is virtually impossible to find evidence in the Suttas that one should come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā. There are a number of passages repeated in many Suttas dealing with the four fine material Jhānas. Nowhere in any of these passages is it said that one should come out of Jhāna to gain the three kinds of knowledge—knowledge of seeing previous lives, knowledge of beings dying and taking rebirth according to their karmas, and knowledge of the destruction of defilements.

The belief that one must come out of Jhāna to gain supernormal knowledge (abhiññās) or to destroy defilements and attain enlightenment is based on an assumption that the concentrated mind becomes one with the object of meditation and is absorbed into that object. For this reason some people translate Jhāna or samādhi as absorption concentration. If the mind is absorbed into the object then the mind is paralyzed and incapable of doing anything.

This may be true when the Jhāna is gained without mindfulness. This is what happened to the teachers of the Bodhisatta Gotama. They were stuck in Jhāna but they thought that they had attained enlightenment. This cannot happen when you practice Jhāna with mindfulness. When

we attain right Jhāna, our mindfulness is pure, our equanimity is strong, our concentration is strong and our attention is sharp.

If you are not aware of consciousness, mindfulness, attention, and concentration then you are in *deep sleep*. This is the state you go through when you are under an anesthetic. We struggle to attain concentration not to get into this kind of deep sleep and forget ourselves. We strive very hard to gain concentration to become fully aware of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of the body, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations and consciousness.

Coming out of Jhāna means that we are no longer in Jhāna. All the hindrances that we have overcome with great difficulty will rush back to the mind and the mind will once again be cluttered with hindrances. We will lose clarity, purity, concentration, light, and mindfulness. If you want to come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā, then you should not waste your valuable time to attain it at all. You should use that time to practice Vipassanā from the beginning.

It is in the Jhānic state and only in the Jhānic state that equanimity, mindfulness and concentration are powerful enough to perform these activities. Once the meditator comes out of Jhāna the mind's strength and power begin to weaken. The longer the meditator is out of Jhāna the weaker becomes that power and strength because the hindrances slowly return in their full strength. Finally the mind becomes as it was before attaining Jhānas.

Then you cannot directly see past and future lives nor destroy defilements. You can think rationally and logically about them, but you cannot experience them directly.

The Jhānic state is a perfect state of mind from which to focus on the four noble truths, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness. It is the perfect state from which to realize Nibbāna by eliminating all the fetters. Once we attain Jhāna we use its powerful concentration with the light and vision to see things as they really are.

"When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives..."

When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the passing away and

reappearance of beings...

When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. He understands as it actually is: 'This is suffering';... 'This is the origin of suffering';... 'This is the cessation of suffering';... 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering';... 'These are the taints';... 'this is the origin of the taints';... 'This is the cessation of the taints';... 'This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.'"[MN 111]

These passages are repeated in many places in the Pali Suttas. They refer to the fourth Jhāna. It is the fourth Jhāna itself that is purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability. In this passage there is no suggestion at all that the meditator should leave the fourth Jhāna to attain these understandings.

In conclusion, we would like to cite a passage from Cūla-hatthipadopama Sutta in Majjhima Nikāya. This passage is conclusive evidence that one should not come out of Jhāna in order to attain full enlightenment by seeing the Four Noble Truths and destroying the taints.

"When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. He understands as it actually is: 'This is suffering'; 'This is the origin of suffering'; 'This is the cessation of suffering'; 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering'; 'These are the taints'; 'This is the origin of the taints'; 'This is the cessation of the taints'; 'This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.' ... When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: "It is liberated." He understands: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.'"

Metta

5 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 328 July 21, 2023, 7:16pm

I've also noticed that many teachers of the non-corporeal jhanas of the Pa-Auk system explain that during Anapanasati, after a while, the meditator no longer perceives the difference between inhalation and exhalation, and is only aware of the breath as a stable homogeneous block.

Yet throughout the instructions in MN 118, the Buddha explains that the meditator is aware of inhalation and aware of exhalation. Indeed, each time, he says this : « *a bhikkhu (...) understands: 'I breathe in...' (...) 'I breath out...'* » or « *a bhikkhu (...) trains thus: 'I shall breathe in...' (...) 'I shall breath out...'* ». This implies that the meditator is indeed aware of both separately, and does not confuse them into some kind of stable homogeneous block.

[Ceisiwr](#) 329 July 21, 2023, 10:42pm

DeadBuddha:

Interesting, please can you say more about these teachers, their current, etc? I'm very intrigued by this, as I had the impression that it was something relatively recent.

Insight occurs whilst in Jhāna according to Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and different currents of Mahāyāna Buddhism generally. Most Mahāyānist Buddhists that I know also define sukha in Jhāna as being bodily pleasure, from what I've read. Likely as an influence from the Sautrāntikas.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 330 July 21, 2023, 10:43pm

DeadBuddha:

I've also noticed that many teachers of the non-corporeal jhanas of the Pa-Auk system explain that during Anapanasati, after a while, the meditator no longer perceives the difference between inhalation and exhalation, and is only aware of the breath as a stable homogeneous block.

Yet throughout the instructions in [MN 118](#), the Buddha explains that the meditator is aware of inhalation and aware of exhalation. Indeed, each time, he says this : « *a bhikkhu (...) understands: 'I breathe in...' (...) 'I breath out...'* » or « *a bhikkhu (...) trains thus: 'I shall breathe in...' (...) 'I shall breath out...'* ». This implies that the meditator is indeed aware of both separately, and does not confuse them into some kind of stable homogeneous block.

According to the Vaibhāṣika breathing in and out occurs whilst in the Jhānas (accept the 4th).

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 331 July 21, 2023, 11:00pm

For example, when discussing the Liberations, Spheres of Mastery and Kasiṇas

A. *Vimokṣas 1–3, eight abhibhus and kṛtsnas 1–8.*

1. In nature they are the [five skandhas](#) and they have as object the visibles of [kāmadhātu](#).
2. Vimokṣas 1–2 and abhibhus 1–4 are contemplations of the horrible ([aśubhabhāvana](#)), i.e., of the decomposing corpse, and are practiced in the 1st and 2nd dhyānas. When practiced in the first, they counteract attachment to color (*varṇarāga*) of kāmadhātu; when practiced in the second, they counteract attachment to color of the first dhyāna.
3. In vimokṣa 1 and abhibhus 1–2, the ascetic still has the notion of inner visibles, those of his own body; in vimokṣa 2 and abhibhus 3–4, he no longer has them. But in all cases, he contemplates unpleasant outer visibles (*amanojñā*), less numerous (*paritta*) in abhibhus 1 and 3, numerous (*mahodgata* or *paramāna*) in abhibhus 2 and 4.
4. Vimokṣa 3, abhibhus 5–8 and kṛtsnas 1–8 are contemplations on the beautiful (*śubhabhāvana*) and are practiced exclusively in the 4th dhyāna. No longer having the notion of inner visibles, the ascetic contemplates the outer pleasant visibles ([manojñā](#)) of kāmadhātu: in vimokṣa 3, the beautiful ([śubha](#)) in general, which he actualizes (*kāyena sākādātkaṛoti*); in abhibhus 5–8 and kṛtsnas 5–8, the four pure colors (blue, yellow, red and white); in kṛtsnas 1–4, the four great elements (earth, water, fire and wind).

[Preliminary note to liberations, masteries and totalities \(wisdomlib.org\)](#)

As a side note generally I find the Sarvāstivādin explanation of these things far more satisfying than the Theravādin one, which hardly discusses them and just collapses them all into the same practice. Namely, Kasiṇa meditation. Also note that for the Sarvāstivādins the Kasiṇas are developed in the 4th Jhāna, instead of being a means to obtain the Jhānas in the Theravādin tradition.

This paper is worth a read

Mindfulness of breathing facilitates the attainment of both tranquillity meditation (*śamatha*) and insight meditation (*vipaśyanā*). Does one practice *vipaśyanā* while in dhyāna or after emerging from dhyāna? Regarding this controversy of *vipaśyanā* practice, Ven. Bodhi says:

“The commentarial method of explanation stipulates that the meditator emerges from the jhāna attainment and practices insight contemplation with a mind made sharp and supple by the jhāna. However, the suttas themselves say nothing about emerging from the jhāna. If one reads the suttas alone, without the commentaries, it seems as if the meditator examines the factors within the jhāna itself”...

According to the Visuddhimagga and the Vimuttimagga, the union of śamatha and vipaśyanā occurs after one emerges from dhyāna. In contrast, according to the Yogācārabhūmi, the Mahāvibhāṣā, the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, and the Tattvasiddhiśāstra, this union takes place while one is in dhyāna.

Issues in śamatha and vipaśyanā : a comparative study of Buddhist meditation

You do get some irregularities with these. For example the Sarvāstivādin and Yogācārin position is that the 5 sense consciousness do not occur, however they also say that the body is still experienced.

1 Like

[sikkhadhamma](#) 332 July 21, 2023, 11:35pm

Ceisiwr:

breathing in and out occurs whilst in the Jhānas (accept the 4th)

I wonder in which step the 4th jhāna is within the 16 steps found in the Ānāpānassatisutta because each step involves either breathing in or breathing out. Thank you in advance.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 333 July 21, 2023, 11:44pm

Here is an example from the Dharmatrāta-Dhyāna-Sūtra

Or, similar to the contemplation
of the absolute truth (paramārtha-satya) of the (four
noble) truths,
suffering (duḥkha) comes before its cause
(samudaya).

The observation of breathing is the same.

It is firstly long
and then becomes short.

It is wrong to assert that
breathing in the first dhyāna is short
and that in the second dhyāna is long,
for it contradicts what is being experienced.

In the first dhyāna,
the force of the breath lasts very long,
in the second dhyāna the breath becomes short,
and what is being experienced comes to gradually
differ.

When one's whole body experiences illuminating
awareness, one has entered the third dhyāna.
Eventually, all his bodily activities (kāya-saṃskāra)
have come to a halt,
for all his pores have been left behind.

This sums up the fact
that the various forms of samādhi
which arise on the accumulation
of positive effects
should form the dwelling place
of the practitioner who
could then avoid the disturbance
of distracted thought (viṭarka)
and consideration (vicāra).

Its not really clear where the 4th Jhāna kicks in here. There were debates around what was done in each Jhāna, as shown above.

2 Likes

[sikkhadhamma](#) 334 July 22, 2023, 12:25am

I wonder in which step the 1st, 2nd and 3rd jhāna kicks in within the 16 steps found in the Ānāpānassatisutta.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 335 July 22, 2023, 12:37am

Some masters taught that “long breath” was in the 1st Jhāna, “short breath” in the 2nd Jhāna and so on. The text above disagrees with that exegesis. Personally I take a different view. I think, like Satipaṭṭhāna, the tetrads aren’t progressive. Rather they are different aspects of the same experience that we pay attention to and develop.

2 Likes

[sikkhadhamma](#) 336 July 22, 2023, 1:05am

Considering:

1. Ānāpānassati is about being mindful/aware of breathing;
2. Again, all the 16 steps in MN118 involve either breathing in or breathing out; and
3. All breathing process takes place within the physical body.

How does one know (be aware) that they are breathing while in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd jhāna if all bodily sensations are ‘gone’ during the jhāna session?

Thank you.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 337 July 22, 2023, 1:24am

sikkhadhamma:

How does one know (be aware) that they are breathing while in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd jhāna if all bodily sensations are ‘gone’ during the jhāna session?

This depends on how you view Jhana. With bodily sensations or not.

2 Likes

[sikkhadhamma](#) 338 July 22, 2023, 2:56am

Ceisiwr:

With bodily sensations or not.

I found something interesting, I thought I would share it here:

In appanāsamādhi the mind calms down and is stilled to a level where it is at its most subtle and skilful. Even if you experience sense impingement from the outside, such as sounds and physical sensations, it remains external and is unable to disturb the mind.

-Ajahn Chah

[the_teachings_of_ajahn_chah_web.pdf](#)

3.61 MB

(Page 454)

[DeadBuddha](#) 339 July 22, 2023, 4:08pm

Ceisiwr:

Insight occurs whilst in Jhāna according to Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika

Interesting, thank you.

If you don't mind, I'd like to know how you come by this information. I'd also like to find out what positions ancient schools of Buddhism have taken on jhanas, whether it's the possibility of practising vipassana during jhana, or the bodily aspect of jhanas.

I feel that even now, I have the ingrained impression that the traditional, orthodox Buddhist position is that the Buddha's jhana are without the 5 senses, as if for millennia the only type of jhana taught was non-corporeal jhana, and that the idea that jhana are bodily is only a modern one (and from there, it's only a short step to think that bodily jhana are only an expression of the degeneration of dhamma, since they are recent). I have seen several teachers of non-corporeal jhanas implicitly use the degeneration of dhamma as an argument in favor of non-corporeal jhana.

And contrary to this, if I follow you (and I've also read this elsewhere), it seems that this is not true, and that there were already very old significant theses in favor of bodily jhanas. That's also why I'd like to know how you go about researching this subject.

In addition, given that for a while you supported the idea that the Buddha's jhanas no longer have the 5 senses, I'd like to know what made you change your mind.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 340 July 22, 2023, 4:13pm

Interesting, thank you.

At Pa-Auk, it is possible that they would say that the inhalation and exhalation continue (except in the 4th), but that the inhalation and exhalation are not separately perceived in the meditator's head.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 341 July 22, 2023, 5:12pm

It's about the passage as a whole, which sounds to me much more like withdrawing from the five senses than withdrawing into a hut or forest. For example, it says that the sensual perceptions cease at the moment one enters first jhāna, just like perception of *pīti* ends at the moment one enters the third jhāna. This doesn't seem to refer to going into physical seclusion, which is usually done long before abandoning the hindrances and entering jhāna.

Let me quote the passage once more, for clarity:

When they get fully separated from sensory experiences and separated from unskillful states of mind, they attain the first jhana, where there is delight and bliss (*sukha*) caused by the separation [from the sensory experiences], to which the mind moves and holds on. The perception of sensory experiences which they had before, ceases. At that time there is subtle but true perception of delight and bliss caused by the separation, and they only have that perception, subtle but true, of delight and bliss caused by the separation. That is how through training some perceptions [of the five senses] cease while others [of *pītisukha*] arise.

The thing abandoned in the first jhāna is also called a ‘perception’, just like the feeling of *pīṭisukha* is called a perception. Walking into seclusion doesn’t really make certain “perceptions” cease, I would say, at least not in the same way the perception of *pīṭi* ceases in the third jhāna. However, the cessation of sounds, smells, and so on, is cessation in very much the same sense. (To pre-empt possible responses by others, I know in some other places *kāmasaññā* means perceptions of sense *desire*, but I don’t think that’s the case here in [DN9](#).)

Elsewhere “fully separated from sensual objects (*kāmā*)” is also explained as “one has thoroughly ended sensual objects (*kāmā*)”. ([AN9.33](#)) That also doesn’t sound like withdrawing into the forest to me. By walking into a forest, you don’t really *thoroughly end* the “sensual objects”; you just move away from them. However, in my view of jhāna, sounds, sights, smells, etc, *do* actually thoroughly come to an end.

The sense I get is that what has ceased here is something like this

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, the thought occurred to me: ‘My mind may often stray towards those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart but which have passed, ceased, and changed, or towards those that are present, or slightly towards those in the future.’ Then it occurred to me: ‘Being set on my own welfare, I should practise diligence, mindfulness, and guarding of the mind in regard to those five cords of sensual pleasure that have already left their impression on the heart, which have passed, ceased, and changed.” - SN 35.117

Well, that’s exactly where we disagree, isn’t it? 😊 [As I said](#), I think one needs to do something else too, namely withdrawing the mind from the five senses. That’s why there are two prerequisites for attaining the first jhāna in the standard formula, not one. Another argument is, if you only needed to abandon the unskillful qualities, the enlightened ones would always be in jhāna, because all unskillful qualities depend on ignorance ([SN20.1](#)).

They wouldn’t always be in Jhāna because they wouldn’t always be meditating. In order to enter the 1st Jhāna you have to meditate and intentionally form the formation of rapture. From there you can enter the other Jhānas.

That’s how *sukha*-indriya is defined there, yes. But [as discussed before](#), it is said in [SN48.40](#) that this kind of *sukha* (bodily *sukha*) does *not* exist in the third jhāna! So the *sukha* that exists in the third jhāna must be a different kind of *sukha*, which is mental. Therefore, it can’t be felt “with the body” (“*kāyena*”).

If you look at the parallels (not listed on SuttaCentral, but there were parallels once) you see that SN 48.40 is the outlier. The parallel, known as the Aviparīṭaka Sutta, is found in the *Yogācārabhūmi*

-*Śāstra*, the *Tattvasiddhi* -*Śāstra* and the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. There we find this order:

1st Jhāna: Domanassa (mental pain) ceases

2nd Jhāna: Dukkha (physical pain) ceases

3rd Jhāna: Somanassa (mental pleasure) ceases

4th Jhāna: Sukha (physical pleasure) ceases.

This matches what we see with the Jhānas, where pleasure & pain are abandoned in the 4th Jhāna. It also makes more sense. Rapture is the basis for somanassa, and so when it goes somanassa goes leaving the 3rd Jhāna. Since we are dealing with somanassa and sukha as separate things, and since somanassa has gone, the sukha remaining in the 3rd Jhāna must be physical. Based then on the parallels and the general theme of the Indriyasamūyutta, sukha in the 3rd Jhāna then is bodily pleasure.

It does make sense on some level, and I used to think of it like that too. But I think the practice goes much deeper than just bodily relaxation. I take this to mean your body becomes so tranquil you can't feel it anymore. That happens because you focus on the pīti (which is mental), being no longer interested in the body. Then the mind feels the ease (sukha) of not having that burden of the body anymore, the ease of being away from the senses.

(It's good news for those in chronic pain: the body can also be tranquilized in this way if it is in pain. To attain jhānas the pain fades away into the background; it doesn't need to be transformed into bodily pleasure, which sometimes just isn't feasible. Also good news for quadriplegics, who, not being able to feel the body, can't attain the bodily jhānas of some interpretations.)

Some Chinese parallels also say that both body *and* mind become tranquil at this point, not just the body.

Well let me clarify that when I say bodily tranquillity, I do mean something extra ordinary. The body becomes so tranquil and light its hardly there, but it is still there. When it becomes very tranquil and light its form changes to that of those in the deva realms, of subtle matter. I suppose my position is in-between those who teach a "Jhāna lite", for want of a better word, and "hard Jhāna". I also agree that tranquillity is both of mind and body. The suttas say this also. Apologies if my overemphasis on the bodily aspect seemed like I was ignoring the mental aspect of it.

Exactly, it's *spiritual* (or literally "not of the flesh"), which **means**, "relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things", synonyms being 'psychological', 'inner', and 'non-material'. To avoid confusion, I prefer to translate *nirāmisa* following Cone and Digital Pali Dictionary as 'non-physical'. PED and Buddhadatta also have 'non-material'.

What I'm saying is, pleasure felt "with the body" is **not** spiritual, not *nirāmisā*. That's what *Sāmisā* means, "of the flesh", i.e. "of the body". (As in Matthew 26:41: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh (body) is weak.")

We also have to be consistent when possible. If *nirāmisā pīti* is a mental emotion, as you seem to agree (and which is hard to deny since it's called *pīti-māna*), then *nirāmisā sukha* must also be a mental emotion.

The "material" means the *kāmaguṇa*. So material rapture and pleasure is that which comes from playing a video game. Spiritual rapture and pleasure doesn't come from indulging in sensual pleasures, but in the stillness of the body and mind. You are reading it to mean "physical in general", which I think misses the point.

No, here the two are definitely synonymous. Notice that in *uppañjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ* the verb *uppañjati* is singular, which means that one thing arises, not two separate ones. You can see a peculiarity in Sujato's translation, where subject and verb don't agree in number: "pleasure and happiness arises". The word "and" isn't there in Pali, that's the thing. More literally it says: "[there] arises sukha, which is somanassa". The two words are attributes to one another, not different things.

There are other cases where we see "*uppañjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ*". Here for example:

'The pleasure and happiness that arise from the eye: this is its gratification.

'yaṃ kho cakkhuṃ paṭicca uppañjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ cakkhussa assādo. - SN 35.13

They occur whenever the gratification and drawback of x is discussed. I don't know why the Pāli is framed that way, but I don't think synonyms is the answer. Both Ven. Bodhi and Sujato use "and" when translating these passages. If then we go with my initial argument, you can't say that because *sukha* is spiritual it has to be mental in nature and if we are indeed dealing with two different things, since *somanassa* is discussed *sukha* then must mean physical ease in SN 36.31. This would fit the overall theme of the *Indriyasamyutta* that I mentioned earlier, and the parallel versions of SN48.40.

I got your line of reasoning already, but I don't find it satisfying. I'm not sure whether you saw my [later post](#) when you typed this. So to clarify, I think the essential comparison being made is much more pragmatic than that, and also more directly related to the central theme of the sutta, which is how the nine attainments are a basis for enlightenment, not whether one becomes enlightened inside of them or not.

The comparison being made is *how* you contemplate these states. When it comes to the last two attainments you can't "contemplate the phenomena there", because there just are not enough

“phenomena” there. So when the Buddha says, “thus there is penetration to final knowledge as far as meditative attainments accompanied by perception”, the word “thus” means “in that way”—which is to say, penetration occurs in the way he just described for the attainments with perception, namely through analyzing “the phenomena there”. But it’s different for the final two.

The sutta doesn’t actually say the penetration to enlightenment happens *inside* the first seven attainments. That is something added on through interpretation, including in that article you linked, which is why I still think it makes a “John had breakfast in bed”-type argument. (There should be a better name for this! ‘Appeal to ignorance’, I believe is the name, claiming something is true because of something not being said. That is to say, “It isn’t said one comes out of jhana, therefore one doesn’t come out of jhana.”)

I mean, it’s true that the sutta only mentions having to be skilled in entering and emergence for the last two attainments. But does this therefore mean one doesn’t have to be skilled in these things for the prior attainments? I don’t think so. Elsewhere these skills are said to be important for developing *all* attainments of samādhi including the jhānas. A whole book in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, SN34, is all about these skills. There’s also [SN52.21](#), [AN2.163](#), [AN6.64](#), [AN6.72](#), [AN7.40](#)–41, and more. Suffice to say, the idea isn’t exactly marginal! 😊 And I think these skills are also implied in this sutta ([AN9.36](#)) for *all* nine states, especially because they are said to lead to enlightenment, which implies people are already skilled in these things.

Forgive me but that seems a bit tortuous to me Bhante. The sutta is about the attainments and how they are a basis for awakening. Up to Nothingness they are a basis for awakening because they include perception. The final two do not, but are a basis for awakening when skilled at entering and leaving them. The whole point of saying that is to say that you can’t awaken whilst inside them, because there is barely any perception at all or none. It’s a completely redundant comparison if you gain insight whilst outside of all of the attainments, because with all of them one gains insights when skilled in entering and emerging from them. The final two work differently when it comes to awakening. Since perception is needed for wisdom, and since there is no perception (or hardly any) in them, you have to leave them to awaken. This is the straightforward reading of the sutta, and it’s how old northern schools interpreted it too. Also this

“There should be a better name for this! ‘Appeal to ignorance’, I believe is the name, claiming something is true because of something not being said. That is to say, “It isn’t said one comes out of jhana, therefore one doesn’t come out of jhana.”

is a straw man, since that isn’t my argument. My argument isn’t that because they don’t say one leaves, awakening occurs whilst in them. My argument is that due to the comparison being made with the final two, it means awakening occurs whilst in them. When there is no perception there is no wisdom, so one has to leave the attainment, regain perception and then there is wisdom. Ergo,

you don't need to enter and leave the previous attainments for there to be wisdom since there is perception there.

It's somewhat off topic, but I think that is very true, at least if we're talking about enlightenment. The body's impermanence is obvious if one gives it a second of thought, one doesn't need jhana for that. But if one wants to understand impermanence of the aggregates/senses, on deep level that leads to awakening, something beyond the intellect, then one needs to see them cease. Two suttas earlier, in [AN9.34](#), this is also explained with respect to dukkha using the jhānas. To understand for example how pīti in the third jhāna is "an affliction" (same word as mentioned in [AN9.36](#)), one needs to go beyond it (e.g. attain fourth jhāna) and then have it come back again. Through impermanence one understands suffering. The absence of a self can also be understood through seeing things cease. (E.g. [MN148](#)) Example: if the five senses cease in the first jhāna, you'll be able to acknowledge deeply that they are anattā.

Anyway, that is only a tangential argument for the insights in [AN9.36](#) to happen after the jhānas. My main argument is that it is not specifically mentioned to happen inside the jhānas (nor is this the case anywhere else). But there are other suttas where the person clearly comes out of jhāna at some point, yet emergence also isn't mentioned there. Emergence is always implied, is what I'm saying.

In DN 2 we find the following

"When his mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He understands thus: 'This is my body, having material form, composed of the four primary elements, originating from father and mother, built up out of rice and gruel, impermanent, subject to rubbing and pressing, to dissolution and dispersion. And this is my consciousness, supported by it and bound up with it.'

This is insight into the dependent nature of the body and mind, and so impermanence, yet the body has not actually ceased. To see impermanence you don't need to see things directly ceasing. You just need to "see" it, like when I "see" your argument. In other words, there is understanding (wisdom).

A final word. In [SN16.13](#) it is said the dhamma will disappear when counterfeit dhamma appears in the world. It happens when people "lack respect and reverence for" certain things. And only one factor of the path is mentioned: samādhi. In my opinion, the bodily jhāna interpretations are a lack of reverence for how powerful the mind is, not respecting how deep it can go; and how deep it *needs* to go in order to see the dhamma. What, samādhi is at the very end of the path! but people claim these things are rather ordinary states. I think that's very dangerous for the continuance of our Teacher's dispensation, especially if people start actively discouraging the absorption jhānas, which is why I care about this topic.

This wasn't aimed at me, but to clarify my position again I don't think the Jhānas are ordinary states and I don't think the tranquillity of the body and mind, nor the bodily experience in Jhāna, is like the ordinary sense. In other words I don't think you can just get into Jhāna by feeling relaxed at a bus stop or whatnot. As I quoted earlier, my view is more like this

When the mind dwells on an image, the body would be soft, gentle, and blissful. All anger, anxiety, grief, and other afflictive mental dharmas are ceased.¹⁷⁴ The mind acquires swift blissfulness never before experienced, which surpasses the five desires. Because the mind is pure without any defilement, the body will shine brightly. It is like a pure and clean mirror [shining] the light externally, or like the shining light of bright pearl that appears, illumines, and manifests in the pure water... the body has bright light. When one attains the first dhyāna, its mark is that it continuously changes, increases, and excels [than before]. cause the four elements of the Desire Realm spread fully all over the body, which is soft, harmonious, gentle, and joyful signs, and the mind leaves bad desire and unwholesome deed, then the samādhi of single-minded thought can cause one having joy and happiness.¹⁸³ Forms created in the Form Realm have the feature of bright light. Hence, the cultivator sees the wonderful and bright light emitting from the body internally and externally...The blissfulness of the first dhyāna is spread all over the body internally and externally. As the water soaks into dry earth, it is wet and moist inside and outside. The experience of blissfulness of the Desire Realm cannot spread through the body and mind.

Chán fǎ yào jiě (Essential Explanation of The Method of Dhyāna)

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 342 July 22, 2023, 5:27pm

This is a very interesting comment, thank you very much.

Yes, some suttas clearly state that there is no more inhalation/exhalation during the fourth jhana. For example:

- AN 9.31 (Bodhi) :

(4) For one who has attained the fourth.jhana, in-breathing and out-breathing have ceased.

- SN 36.11 (Bodhi):

For one who has attained the fourth jhana, in-breathing and out-breathing have ceased.

But at the same time, all the Anapanasati tetrads speak of an awareness of inspiration/expiration. How can we understand the relationship between Anapanasati and the fourth jhana?

You might think that Anapanasati's tetrads are just a means of reaching the fourth jhana, but that once the jhanas have been reached, there's no longer any need to use tetrads. For example, you reach the fourth jhana through the first tetrad, then, once you're in the fourth jhana, you no longer practice Anapanasati, since there is no longer any inhalation and exhalation.

However, my impression is that the fact that there is no longer any inhalation/exhalation in the fourth jhana does not prevent you from being attentive to the breath. In other words, in the fourth jhana, we are no longer aware of breathing as a series of inhalations and exhalations, but we are aware of breathing as a homogeneous block. (And the difference with the Pa-Auk system is that Pa-Auk says that even before jhana, we are no longer aware of inhalation/exhalation during Anapanasati tetrads).

But to say that homogeneous breathing is the object of the fourth jhana seems to imply that being in the fourth jhana prevents one from practicing Anapanasati at the same time...

I was inspired by this article by Venerable Thanissaro: [Advanced Practice | With Each & Every Breath](#)

[Ceisiwr](#) 343 July 22, 2023, 5:57pm

DeadBuddha:

If you don't mind, I'd like to know how you come by this information. I'd also like to find out what positions ancient schools of Buddhism have taken on jhanas, whether it's the possibility of practising vipassana during jhana, or the bodily aspect of jhanas.

Reading some of Ven. Dhammajoti's work such as this (thoroughly recommend): *The aśubhā Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda* ([PDF](#)) [The aśubhā Meditation in the Sarvāstivāda \(researchgate.net\)](#) or "Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma":

Having achieved tranquility, the practitioner then proceeds to the practice of insight comprising the fourfold application of mindfulness⁴⁰ on body (kāya), sensation (vedanā), ideations (saṃjñā) and dharma-s.⁴¹ This is done in two ways: First, he contemplates the specific characteristics⁴² of each of the four — the body is impure; sensations are unsatisfactory (duḥkha); ideations are impermanent; all dharma-s are without a Self.⁴³ He must also contemplate generally that the body, sensations, ideations and dharma-s are — in each case — like all conditioned dharma-s in being impure, unsatisfactory, impermanent and without a Self. Next, he contemplates collectively that all four — body, sensations, ideations and dharma-s — are equally impure, unsatisfactory, impermanent and without a Self. It is to be noted that for

the Sarvāstivādins, śamatha and vipaśyanā are not mutually exclusive practices, nor are they to be too sharply differentiated. It is an abhidharma doctrine that within one and the same thought there exists both śamatha and vipaśyanā.⁴⁴ Indeed, according to the Sarvāstivāda, samādhi and prajñā necessarily co-exist as two of the ten universal thought-concomitants (see supra, § 9.3.4.1). The two types of practitioner are to be distinguished from the point of view of their preparatory stages:

Those who mostly cultivate the requisites of śamatha are those who, at the stage of preparatory effort, always delight in solitude and shun noisiness. They see the faults of socializing and constantly dwell in quiet places. When they enter into the noble path, they are called the śamatha-type of practitioner (śamatha-carita). Those who mostly cultivate the requisites of vipaśyanā are those that, at the stage of preparatory effort, always delight in studying and reflecting on the tripiṭaka. They repeatedly examine the specific and general characteristics of all dharma-s. When they enter into the noble path, they are called the vipaśyanā-type of practitioner (vipaśyanā-carita).⁴⁵

Their mutual non-exclusiveness is also underscored in the various opinions given in the MVŚ⁴⁶ by different Ābhidharmika masters as to how many of the six aspects of mindfulness of breathing (§ 15.3.1.1) come under either śamatha or vipaśyanā: Some say the first three are śamatha, the last three vipaśyanā; others say the opposite. The compilers of the MVŚ remark that “there is no fixed rule here — all may come under śamatha or all may come under vipaśyanā”.

One question here arises: Does one need to attain the dhyāna-s in order to acquire the pure prajñā which liberates us from saṃsāra? Does one in fact need to practice meditation at all? From the Sarvāstivāda Ābhidharmika perspective, the answer is clearly ‘yes’. It is stated that the four skillful roots (i.e., the nirvedhabhāgīya) can only be produced from the understanding derived from cultivation, not from those derived from reflection and listening.⁴⁷ In other words, at the preparatory stage leading to the actual attainment of warmth, etc., the practitioner necessarily depends on meditative practices. It is further stated that the practitioner can acquire these roots only at the stages of the ‘not-yet-arrived’ (anāgāmya), the intermediate meditation (dhyānāntara) and the four meditations (dhyāna).⁴⁸ This means that he must have acquired the degree of concentration of the ‘not-yet arrived’ stage. This stage is a ‘neighborhood’ (sāmantaka), i.e., a meditative state bordering the dhyāna stage proper into which its power of concentration is strong enough to lead. There is one such ‘neighborhood’ stage bordering each of the meditative attainments (samāpatti). Since there are eight meditative attainments — four dhyāna-s (also called the four ‘fundamental or principal meditations’, maula-dhyāna) of the fine-material sphere and four meditative attainments of the non-material sphere (ārūpya) — there are corresponding eight neighbourhood stages, the first of which, bordering the first dhyāna, is called the ‘not-yet-arrived’ stage.

Or other material

**Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (particularlry [Stage of Samāhita](#))

Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra: *[Maha Prajnaparamita Sastra \(wisdomlib.org\)](#)

Chán fǎ yào jiě (Essential Explanation of The Method of Dhyāna): [The Sutra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation - BDK America](#)

Xiao Zhiguan (* *Small Treatise on Concentration and Insight*) by Ven. Zhiyi

Issues in Śamatha and Vipāśyanā: A Comparative Study of Buddhist Meditation by a-Chun (Bhikkhuni Syinchen) Hung

Clarification on Feelings in Buddhist Dhyāna/Jhāna Meditation by Tse-Fu Kuan

Abhidharmakośabhāṣya by Ven. Vasubandhu

In addition, given that for a while you supported the idea that the Buddha's jhanas no longer have the 5 senses, I'd like to know what made you change your mind.

The arguments in favour didn't hold up anymore, with further investigation and I found there is a history in Buddhism of teaching non-absorbed Jhānas. Its not a modern thing, although some modern explanations of non-absorbed Jhānas are different to the old ones.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 344 July 22, 2023, 6:09pm

DeadBuddha:

If you don't mind, I'd like to know how you come by this information. I'd also like to find out what positions ancient schools of Buddhism have taken on jhanas, whether it's the possibility of practising vipassana during jhana, or the bodily aspect of jhanas.

From *Issues in Śamatha and Vipāśyanā: A Comparative Study of Buddhist Meditation* by a-Chun (Bhikkhuni Syinchen) Hung

According to the Visuddhimagga and the Vimuttimagga, the union of śamatha and vipāśyanā occurs after one emerges from dhyāna. 524 In contrast, according to the Yogācārabhūmi, the Mahāvibhāṣā, the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, and the Tattvasiddhiśāstra, this union takes place

while one is in dhyāna. Unequivocally, śamatha and vipaśyanā are one path for a yogin to extirpate defilements leading to ultimate deliverance...

Harivarman, in his **Tattvasiddhiśāstra*, also shows that insight is developed while one is in dhyāna. He points out that the Buddha says wisdom occurs while one is in dhyāna, because when one attains dhyāna and defilements arise, then one develops wisdom so as to abandon defilements and make this samādhi as “noble purity.” That one abandons defilements by wisdom while in dhyāna illustrates that insight is developed within dhyāna, as the Yogācārabhūmi states that a meditator develops wisdom while in dhyāna in order to eliminate unskillful mental states which arise from the experience of rapture and pleasure.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 345 July 22, 2023, 6:53pm

Very interesting, I had never thought of assigning a jhana to each stage of Anapanasati...

Taking the translations of the Venerable Thanissaro we see that the calm of the “bodily formation” comes with the fourth jhana ([AN 10.20](#)), and that the “bodily formation” is actually the breath ([MN 44](#)) and so I could conclude that the fourth step of the first tetrad of Anapanasati is actually talking about the fourth jhana.

What do you think?

[Ceisiwr](#) 346 July 22, 2023, 7:11pm

I look at mindfulness of breathing as being different aspects of the same experience, rather than being stages. I don't really practice it much these days. I mostly focus on Paṭikūlamānasikāra. Which reminds me, this is also worth a read: [Religions | Free Full-Text | Meditative Experiences of Impurity and Purity—Further Reflection on the aśubhā Meditation and the śubha-vimokṣa \(mdpi.com\)](#)

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 347 July 22, 2023, 7:15pm

Thank you very much for your clarity and all the references you gave, I'll be able to learn from them. And I find that changing one's mind is a great quality for advancing towards the truth.

And please, could you describe your conception of Anapanasati? In other words, step by step, what is the Anapanasati meditation preached by the Buddha, in your opinion? Do you start by concentrating on breathing through the nostrils, or breathing through the abdomen, or nowhere in particular ; then force the breath to be long and then short, or just naturally become aware of whether the breath is long or short ; etc. ?

Sorry if I'm asking all these questions. But I'm extremely curious about your precise conception of the Buddha's Anapanasati. I find that knowing this meditation is extremely important, so I'm looking at what different people teach to try to refine my understanding.

Thanks in advance.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 348 July 22, 2023, 7:27pm

With a solid foundation in virtue and sense restraint you go somewhere secluded to meditate. You establish awareness of the breath via mindfulness, which also keeps awareness there. You breathe in and out mindful of the breath being long or short. You breathe in being sensitive to the whole breath and body whilst breathing in and out. You breathe in and out whilst being aware of your feelings, your mind (distracted or not) and mentality (with sensual desire etc or not). You breathe in & out contemplating impermanence, fading away, cessation of the hindrances. You breathe in & out being sensitive to rapture, pleasure. You breathe in & out establishing a collected mind. If someone wants to use the nostrils or abdomen as an anchor, that is fine IMO. I don't think you need to force the breath to do anything.

Think of mindfulness of breathing as you would meditation on the body parts. There Satipaṭṭhāna isn't distinct stages you go through, but more different aspects of the same experience when meditating on an aspect of the body.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 349 July 22, 2023, 8:24pm

Thank you so much for the time you take for these very inspiring answers about your conception of Satipatthana and Anapanasati.

I see in your instructions a real intention to conform to what the suttas say! However, there are 2 elements that make me think that the first tetrad concerns only the breathing body and not the biological body.

These elements are this passage from MN 44:

“Friend Visākha, in-breathing and out-breathing are bodily, these are states bound up with the body; that is why in-breathing and out-breathing are the bodily formation. (Bodhi)

and these passages from MN 118:

“Bhikkhus, on whatever occasion a bhikkhu, breathing in long, understands: ‘I breathe in long,’ or breathing out long, understands: ‘I breathe out long’; breathing in short, understands: ‘I breathe in short,’ or breathing out short, understands: ‘I breathe out short’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body of breath’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body of breath’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquillising the bodily formation’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquillising the bodily formation’—**on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. I say that this is a certain body among the bodies, namely, in-breathing and out-breathing. That is why on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body,** ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. (Bodhi)

and

“Bhikkhus, on whatever occasion [mn.iii.84](#) a bhikkhu trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing rapture’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing rapture’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing pleasure’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing pleasure’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the mental formation’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the mental formation’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquillising the mental formation’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquillising the mental formation’—**on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. I say that this is a certain feeling among the feelings, namely, giving close attention to in-breathing and out-breathing. That is why on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating feelings as**

feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. (Bodhi)

- With MN 44, I notice that the “bodily formation” is breathing.
- With the first passage of MN 118, I notice that the Buddha seems to be saying that during the first tetrad, we can say that we contemplate the “body”, but that this contemplated “body” is not just any body, it’s a particular body: breathing.
- And in the second passage of MN 118, we can see the extent to which the Buddha insists, even in a tetrad speaking of mental sensations, that the sensations we contemplate are in fact the breath. This seems to show that the Buddha really does have an astonishing view of breathing compared to the common view.

All this suggests to me that the first tetrad focuses solely on the breath, not on the biological body.

[Ceisiwr](#) 350 July 22, 2023, 8:55pm

DeadBuddha:

All this suggests to me that the first tetrad focuses solely on the breath, not on the biological body.

From the Śāriputrābhidharma

In explaining “Experiencing the whole body he breathes out ... breathes in ...”, it says:
A bhikṣu, having filled the whole body with breath, breathes out. When the whole body is empty [of breath], he breathes in. Just as a skilful master of medicine or his pupil, having filled up his medicine bag, presses it to release the air. When the bag has become empty, he opens its mouth to get it filled with air. Likewise, a bhikṣu, having made the whole body pervaded with air, breathes out. When the whole body is empty, he breathes in.

From the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika’s “*Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra*”

III. “Experiencing the whole body, ...” It is so described even though the breath enters and exits through the nostril. This is because when the mindfulness on the breathing is not yet accomplished, one watches it through the nostril; when this has been accomplished, one watches the pores on the body as lotus stems pervaded by breath which enters and exits through it. This watching does not amount to leaving the meditation because the intention

(āśaya) and the preparatory effort (prayoga) have not yet ceased. Vasumitra explains that this is like the contemplation on all conditioned dharma-s as being impermanent, unsatisfactory etc, without leaving the meditation. (E.g., in the path of vision). Experiencing the breath (being short or long) is not to be regarded as leaving the meditation.

From the Sautrāntika-Dārṣṭāntika tradition

“Whole body” — When the meditator is resolute (信解 adhi-√muc) that the body is hollow, he sees air going out and in the pores on the body. (Cf. ŚrBh, in §6.)

From the Yogācārabhūmi

“Experiencing whole body ...” — He trains thus when he takes as cognitive object the in- and out- breathings through the pores on his whole body and becomes resolute (adhimucyate) with regard to them. (Cf. SatŚ, in §5.1)

This is all taken from Ven. Dhammajoti’s “*The Sixteen-mode Mindfulness of Breathing*”, which you can find here: [385138277-Dhammajoti-KL-Sixteen-mode-Minfulness-of-Breathing-JCBSSL-v-VI-2008.pdf \(archive.org\)](#)

In the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya, on the section with mindfulness of breathing, it talks about breathing in experiencing the breath throughout the body, or something like that (I can’t find the exact quote right now). In comparison for Theravāda its the whole breath that one is aware of. There are some sutras which say something like this too. In the end though, I’m not sure if it matters much.

2 Likes

[Vaddha](#) 351 July 22, 2023, 9:53pm

DeadBuddha:

All this suggests to me that the first tetrad focuses solely on the breath, not on the biological body.

This is a recurrent discussion which will never be ‘solved.’ Clearly both interpretations make sense to derive from the text on various grounds as proven by both modern practitioners/scholars and ancient Buddhist analyses.

One thing I wonder though for those in the 'sabbakāya = whole breath' camp is why the text would use two separate phrases, side-by-side, to refer to the breath which are in fact separate from the normal word for breath also used in the text?

Kāyasaṅkhāra is defined explicitly as the breath as you pointed out, and it's in the fourth step. So why say 'sabbakāya' and then 'kāyasaṅkhāra' if they mean the same thing? Why not 'sabbakāyasaṅkhāra'? There may be some minority textual editions which do have this rendering IIRC, and so there may be some justification there for people, and that's alright. Personally it doesn't seem convincing as the original reading, but not impossible.

The passage after the steps which defines the breath as a certain body among the body is referring to the same expression as in the *satipaṭṭhāna* formula (i.e. *kāye kāyānupassanā*). It isn't defining 'kāya' as 'breath,' it is saying that the breath is an aspect of the kāya which is within the larger collection of physical phenomena one can contemplate, *and thus* the breath practice fulfills the first *satipaṭṭhāna*. That's the scope of that paragraph. So I personally don't find it convincing to say that *kāya* means the breath; it's a subtle thing, but a slightly less accurate reading within the context of the passage IMO.

We can also look at the other *kāyānupassanā* practices for reference. I haven't heard this comparison before, but surely if the first tetrad of *ānāpānasati* is a valid form of it then it would be similar in nature. The main practices, affirmed by the parallels and other passages in the suttas, is the contemplation of the 31 body parts, the contemplation of the body in terms of the 4 elements, and the charnel ground contemplations where one sees their body as the same as/subject to death and decomposition. All of these practices refer to the whole body (with all its parts, or as split up into elements, or as liable to decomposition and death). So there is nothing wrong with being mindful of the whole body (*sabbakāya*) elsewhere in *satipaṭṭhāna*, why then here? (Some teachers suggest it is problematic to have a wider awareness of the breath).

Then of course there's the argument made by others here as well as e.g. Anālayo based on the Mahāsaṃghika or Ekottara passages IIRC that if one is truly aware of the entire breath sensation on a very profound level, the breath sensations permeate the whole body when one is breathing fully with deep relaxation. So being aware of the whole body and the whole breath often end up being synonymous anyway.

I don't tend to hold a strong opinion that it should be one way or the other, but I personally feel that there are some shaky issues in the exclusive reading of 'the whole breath' 'body of the breath.' It doesn't seem so certain.

Mettā 😊❤️

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 352 July 22, 2023, 10:58pm

Wow, thank you so much for these references and the links you give: it's a blessing for me to be informed; for here, I must say, you've taught me important things that I didn't know at all about the ancient schools' conception of this Anapanasati stage !!!

But all the same, reading the passages I've quoted, don't you think it gives a strong impression that the object of attention is only the breathing body? I'd like to know what your impression is when you read these passages.

However, reading the sutta, Venerable Bodhi gets the impression that the instruction is not to focus on the "body of breath" (the term is not used in the Pali of the text), but is to have awareness of breath while having awareness of the biological body. This is very similar to what you said. And the Venerable Bodhi doesn't stop there, but also gives an argument in favor of this interpretation. His argument is that the Pali text reads:

'sabbakāyapaṭisaṁvedī assasissāmī'ti sikkhati, 'sabbakāyapaṭisaṁvedī passasissāmī'ti sikkhati;
(Bodhi, MN 118)

And according to Ven. Bodhi, the word "paṭisaṁvedī" has a stronger meaning than "being aware of". The word "paṭisaṁvedī" would rather mean "hardcore experience, bodily experience". He thinks that if the instruction was to be aware of one's breathing body, the Pali would have used another word.

He explains this here: [Majjhima Nikaya \(MN 118: part 1-1, 2014.7.19\) Bhikkhu Bodhi - YouTube](#)
the video continues here : [Majjhima Nikaya \(MN 118: part 1-2, 2014.7.19\) Bhikkhu Bodhi - YouTube](#)

However, I find the argument strange because "paṭisaṁvedī" is also used concerning mental processes, so I do not have the impression that "paṭisaṁvedī" necessarily means a "hardcore experience, bodily experience" :

'cittasaṅkhārapaṭisaṁvedī assasissāmī'ti sikkhati,
'cittasaṅkhārapaṭisaṁvedī passasissāmī'ti sikkhati ; (Bodhi, MN 118)

But obviously I know NOTHING about pali, whereas Ven. Bodhi is an expert.

Moreover, here Ven; Bodhi explains that he does not agree that the passage on "this is a certain body among the bodies" proves that the instruction is to focus on the body of breathing rather than on the biological body :

Ceisiwr:

In the end though, I'm not sure if it matters much.

Ven. Bodhi says the same thing as you here:

He says that there are different interpretations but that in practice they are all valid.

But I don't really agree. I think the physical world is extremely complex; for proof of this, just look at all the scientific theories with all their complex mathematical equations to describe the world. And I think that the human mind is at least as complex as the physical world; the human mind is very subtle and very difficult to understand, so that by having slightly different meditation practices from the Buddha's, you can achieve extremely different results without realizing it. That's why I think it's extremely important to do exactly what the Buddha says, to get exactly where we're supposed to go, without deluding ourselves and subtly deceiving ourselves about our realizations: the end of suffering.

Edit : The Buddha has given us the precise equations leading to nibbana (sila, samadhi, panna), and a simple slight change in these equations can lead to extremely different results, just as a small error in calculation can lead to totally different results in mathematics.

[DeadBuddha](#) 353 July 22, 2023, 11:20pm

Vaddha:

One thing I wonder though for those in the 'sabbakāya = whole breath' camp is why the text would use two separate phrases, side-by-side, to refer to the breath which are in fact separate from the normal word for breath also used in the text?

Kāyasaṅkhāra is defined explicitly as the breath as you pointed out, and it's in the fourth step. So why say 'sabbakāya' and then 'kāyasaṅkhāra' if they mean the same thing? Why not 'sabbakāyasaṅkhāra'? There may be some minority textual editions which do have this rendering IIRC, and so there may be some justification there for people, and that's alright. Personally it doesn't seem convincing as the original reading, but not impossible.

Yes, I also find this strange. Ven. Kumara mentioned it in his book. But personally it is not enough for me to dismiss this interpretation.

Vaddha:

The passage after the steps which defines the breath as a certain body among the body is referring to the same expression as in the *satipaṭṭhāna* formula (i.e. *kāye kāyānupassanā*). It isn't defining 'kāya' as 'breath,' it is saying that the breath is an aspect of the kāya which is within the larger collection of physical phenomena one can contemplate, *and thus* the breath practice fulfills the first *satipaṭṭhāna*. That's the scope of that paragraph. So I personally don't find it convincing to say that *kāya* means the breath; it's a subtle thing, but a slightly less accurate reading within the context of the passage IMO.

“Bhikkhus, on whatever occasion a bhikkhu, breathing in long, understands: ‘I breathe in long,’ or breathing out long, understands: ‘I breathe out long’; breathing in short, understands: ‘I breathe in short,’ or breathing out short, understands: ‘I breathe out short’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body of breath’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body of breath’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquillising the bodily formation’; trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquillising the bodily formation’—on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. I say that this is a certain body among the bodies, namely, in-breathing and out-breathing. That is why on that occasion a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.

Personally, I find that the explicit meaning of this sutta is that when someone practices these 4 instructions (first tetrad), that person is contemplating the body, and that body that he contemplates is a particular body: breathing. So for me the explicit meaning is clearly that when the person practices these 4 instructions, he contemplates the body of breathing. But obviously, it is my interpretation, even if I find it really strong and explicit.

Vaddha:

We can also look at the other *kāyānupassanā* practices for reference. I haven't heard this comparison before, but surely if the first tetrad of *ānāpānasati* is a valid form of it then it would be similar in nature. The main practices, affirmed by the parallels and other passages in the suttas, is the contemplation of the 31 body parts, the contemplation of the body in terms of the 4 elements, and the charnel ground contemplations where one sees their body as the same as/subject to death and decomposition. All of these practices refer to the whole body (with all its parts, or as split up into elements, or as liable to decomposition and death). So there is nothing wrong with being mindful of the whole body (*sabbakāya*) elsewhere in *satipaṭṭhāna*, why then here? (Some teachers suggest it is problematic to have a wider awareness of the breath).

In addition, to go in your direction, in MN 119, the Buddha speaks of attention to the body allowing jhanas. And he lists several meditations on the body, including Anapanasati. And except for Anapanasati, all the listed meditations obviously concern the biological body (contemplating the body's positions; analysing one's own body as being considered of flesh, pus, etc.; contemplating a corpse) without there being any controversy. It might seem odd that the Buddha teaches meditations about the body with exactly the same meaning to the word "kaya" - biological body -, except at a meditation where the word "kaya" means "body of breathing".

[sikkhadhamma](#) 354 July 23, 2023, 2:37am

DeadBuddha:

This is a very interesting comment, thank you very much.

Yes, some suttas clearly state that there is no more inhalation/exhalation during the fourth jhana.

You are welcome.

If cessation of breath is the true determining factor that distinguishes the 4th jhāna from the other jhānas, I wonder why it is not included in the 4th jhāna formula.

1 Like

[sikkhadhamma](#) 355 July 23, 2023, 2:43am

DeadBuddha:

You might think that Anapanasati's tetrads are just a means of reaching the fourth jhana

Actually, I prefer to see MN118 entirely as a means of reaching fulfillment of knowledge and freedom.

1 Like

[Joe.C](#) 356 July 23, 2023, 4:05am

Sunyo:

It means you lose the ability to attain it, not that you come out of jhāna.

Are you saying that a non returner or even an arahant can lose the ability to attain it? Even though they have perfected the samadhi with wisdom.

Will they still have any hindrances after perfected the samadhi?

or are you saying they are still in jhana? because this statement is in conflict.

1) It means you lose the ability to attain it

2) not that you come out of jhāna.

How can one have a wisdom if they are having hindrances when come out from jhana. Because come out from jhana is going back to sensual realm. Are you saying using a regular human mind, one can have a wisdom?

Insight will occur when one is in jhana. Because there is yoniso manasikara and manovinnana that observing & checking & verifying the factors up to 7th jhana (last 2 need to go back down to nothingness perception or lower to analyze). The higher the jhana, the mind will become more clear due to less and less impurities. 1st-4th jhana is removing vedana (related to 5 senses) and ayatana is removing sanna of the citta (up to sannavedayitanirodha).

I highly doubt someone can know when one is emerging from jhana. Because regular human mind with sensual hindrances or others are just too weak to do the stuff.

As many sutta said Buddha only explain 4 noble truth when one mind is pliable, rid of hindrances, elated (in at least 1st jhana), see below on MN 56:

Then the Buddha taught the householder Upāli step by step, with a talk on giving, ethical conduct, and heaven. He explained the drawbacks of sensual pleasures, so sordid and corrupt, and the benefit of renunciation.

And when he knew that Upāli's **mind was ready, pliable, rid of hindrances, elated, and confident (aka jhana)** he explained the special teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

Just as a clean cloth rid of stains would properly absorb dye, in that very seat the stainless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in Upāli: "Everything that has a beginning has an end."

Then Upāli saw, attained, understood, and fathomed the Dhamma. He went beyond doubt, got rid of indecision, and became self-assured and independent of others regarding the Teacher's

instructions.

btw, contemplation is a wrong word to describe analysis/know of jhana. Because contemplate implying a thought (vitakka) which has ceased on 2nd jhana onwards.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 357 July 23, 2023, 8:09am

I think we can see Anapanasati as allowing both, jhana and nibbana.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 358 July 24, 2023, 3:03pm

[@Ceisiwr](#) I'd like to know what you think about MN 111. Do you think MN 111 is apocryphal? One reason to think so is that this sutta says something impossible because in truth, during "cessation of perception and feeling" there are not the mental factors allowing to remember this realization, and this sutta goes against this fact when it describes how Sariputta emerges from "cessation of perception and feeling" and contemplates the completed phenomena of "cessation of perception and feeling". So the fact that the sutta says something impossible, would justify considering this sutta apocryphal. What's your opinion?

By the way, personally, I don't know if we can't remember "cessation of perception and feeling", but in any case, if that's the case, I wonder how the Buddha managed to tell us about it and describe this state, if he couldn't remember this state.

Incidentally, in researching the "cessation of perception and feeling", I notice that AN 9.41 explains that the Buddha puts an end to defilements when attaining the "cessation of perception and feeling", whereas in MN 36 it says that he attained enlightenment after the fourth jhana (without mentioning the "cessation of perception and feeling"). Odd, isn't it?

Before my awakening—when I was still unawakened but intent on awakening— (...) And so, going totally beyond the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, I entered and remained in the cessation of perception and feeling. And, having seen with wisdom, my defilements were ended.

[kumara](#) 359 July 25, 2023, 9:10am

Brahmali:

Ceisiwr:

It's freedom from sensual pleasures, not the 5 senses.

The five senses are interesting only in so far as they provide pleasure. Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together.

Does that mean that one who is free from sensual pleasure is also blind, deaf, anosmic, ageusic and anesthetic?

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 360 July 25, 2023, 9:14am

Erik_ODonnell:

josephzizys:

If awakened monastics, completely free from attachment to sensual desire where also completely free from sensation and perception then when they went on almsround they would bump into the walls.

It is only while in the jhana state that sensual perceptions are gone (it's part of what defines the first jhana state in the first place).

Then you're saying that one who's not in jhana state is not free from sensual pleasure. (Bear in mind that [@josephzizys](#) was responding to what Aj [@Brahmali](#) said.)

1 Like

[Jasudho](#) 361 July 25, 2023, 11:47am

kumara:

Does that mean that one who is free from sensual pleasure is also blind, deaf, anosmic, ageusic and anesthetic?

In some forms of jhana, *sampatti*, and *saññavedayitanirodha*...yes.

And while the senses are still operating for an Arahant, there's no attachment or identification with them or with any aspect of experience. So the senses, as mere processes, do what they do without the accompanying dukkha of grasping and ignorance.

The freedom of nibbāna with residue, (Iti44):

"And what is the element of extinguishment with something left over? It's when a mendicant is a perfected one, with defilements ended, who has completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their own true goal, utterly ended the fetters of rebirth, and is rightly freed through enlightenment. Their five sense faculties still remain. So long as their senses have not gone they continue to experience the agreeable and disagreeable, to feel pleasure and pain. The ending of greed, hate, and delusion in them is called the element of extinguishment with something left over. "

Hope I didn't misunderstand your post.

1 Like

[Erik_ODonnell](#) 362 July 25, 2023, 12:38pm

kumara:

Then you're saying that one who's not in jhana state is not free from sensual pleasure. (Bear in mind that [@josephzizys](#) was responding to what Aj [@Brahmali](#) said.)

I'd rather not engage in this discussion any more, it seems to have run its course (for me).

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 363 July 25, 2023, 10:22pm

kumara:

Does that mean that one who is free from sensual pleasure is also blind, deaf, anosmic, ageusic and anesthetic?

Freedom from sensual pleasures can mean two things: (1) You are in a *jhāna* where the senses are temporarily absent. (2) You have no attachments to the senses and so there is no barrier to accessing the *jhānas*.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 364 July 26, 2023, 12:17am

Brahmali:

Freedom from sensual pleasures can mean two things: (1) You are in a *jhāna* where the senses are temporarily absent. (2) You have no attachments to the senses and so there is no barrier to accessing the *jhānas*.

Saying this isn't in line with [Indriya-bhavana Sutta: The Development of the Faculties](#)

Anyway, you did say "Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together."

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 365 July 26, 2023, 12:43am

kumara:

Saying this isn't in line with [Indriya-bhavana Sutta: The Development of the Faculties](#)

What problem do you see?

kumara:

Anyway, you did say “Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together.”

My point was just that when you give up sensual desire you also give up desire for the five senses, either temporarily or permanently.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 366 July 26, 2023, 1:18am

Brahmali:

My point was just that when you give up sensual desire you also give up desire for the five senses, either temporarily or permanently.

According to you, when you “give up desire for the five senses”, can you see, hear, etc?

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 367 July 26, 2023, 1:39am

kumara:

According to you, when you “give up desire for the five senses”, can you see, hear, etc?

In a normal waking state, of course. In a deep state of *samādhi*, no.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 368 July 26, 2023, 2:17am

“when you give up **sensual desire** you also give up desire for the five senses”. That’s what you said to explain what you said earlier: “Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together.”

I think I can assume that by “sensual desire” you mean *kāmacchanda*, which is abandoned upon engaging in the jhānas.

Therefore, aren't you then saying that one can engage in the jhānas “in a normal waking state”?

1 Like

[Pondera](#) 369 July 26, 2023, 2:42am

Sunyo:

If you have no perception and feeling (= no consciousness), you can't have “very clear” awareness through the senses.

“Consciousness” is a different aggregate than “perception” and “feeling”.

I think there's a conflation here between “sense consciousness” and “being conscious”.

Consciousness (ie. “being conscious”) is not required for perception and feeling. Eg. We perceive and feel during sleep while unconscious.

But perception and feeling necessarily requires sense consciousness.

In such a way, while in Nirodha Samapatti - one utterly lacks sense consciousness, is non-percipient of things, maintains awareness, and has “clear faculties”. That isn't to say that one will perceive or feel anything through the faculties. However, those faculties will be exceptionally clear.

Similarly, one transitions to Nirodha Samapatti through “neither perception nor non-perception”. In this case one is on the brink of letting go of sense consciousness.

For example, one recognizes that sounds are present, but if, along the same lines, words are being spoken, then the meaning of those words are not comprehended, just the knowledge “sound is occurring”.

The deeper meaning of all of this is that sense perception is what binds us to our body. And letting go of sense perception by blotting out and extinguishing grasping (ie. sense consciousness) is the ultimate release from suffering.

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 370 July 26, 2023, 6:11am

kumara:

Therefore, aren't you then saying that one can engage in the *jhānas* "in a normal waking state"?

In normal *sutta* terminology abandoning means giving up desire and attachment to something. Once the desire is gone, it is easy to enter the *jhāna* because the cessation of the senses is no longer a problem for you.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 371 July 26, 2023, 6:35am

Ah, but then you said, "when you give up **sensual desire** you also give up desire for the five senses". That's what you said to explain what you said earlier: "Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together."

Bear in mind that you said the later bit in response to this:

Ceisiwr:

Dan:

[AN9.42](#) freedom from 5 senses at first jhana (line 3.9 and 4.1).

It's freedom from sensual pleasures, not the 5 senses.

2 Likes

[Brahmali](#) 372 July 26, 2023, 11:55pm

There is the freedom from the five senses when you have no attachment to them. And then there is the separation from the five senses in *jhāna*, which is an additional level of freedom.

1 Like

[sikkhadhamma](#) 373 July 27, 2023, 1:21am

Brahmali:

there is the separation from the five senses in *jhāna*

Hi, Ajahn! I hope you don't mind, I have two questions as below:

Question #1:

Why is there still a possibility of hearing sounds while being separated from the hearing sense?

You might hear a sound, but it won't distract your concentration. There is the hearing of the sound, but the experience is as if you don't hear anything.

-Ajahn Chah

Question #2:

What did the Buddha was referring to when He spoke of *rūpasaññā* in:

That's where perceptions of form cease.'

Ettha rūpasaññā nirujjhati, te ca rūpasaññam nirodhetvā nirodhetvā viharanti'ti.

AN9.33

Thank you in advance.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 374 July 27, 2023, 2:11am

Brahmali:

There is the freedom from the five senses when you have no attachment to them. And then there is the separation from the five senses in *jhāna*, which is an additional level of freedom.

OK. Then why did you say "Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together" in response to this?

Ceisiwr:

Dan:

[AN9.42](#) freedom from 5 senses at first jhana (line 3.9 and 4.1).

It's freedom from sensual pleasures, not the 5 senses.

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 375 July 27, 2023, 3:56am

sikkhadhamma:

Why is there still a possibility of hearing sounds while being separated from the hearing sense?

According to AN10.72, sound is thorn to *jhāna*. This means either that sound can stop you entering *jhāna*, that it can take you out, or both. The moment you hear the sound, however, you are longer in *jhāna*.

All these things have been discussed here before in detail. I would suggest you use the search function to check out the previous discussions.

sikkhadhamma:

What did the Buddha was referring to when He spoke of rūpasaññā

It refers to a very subtle remnant of the perceptions of form that is purely mental. *Rūpa* can be entirely mental (such as in dream). This last vestige of form only ceases after the fourth *jhāna*.

kumara:

OK. Then why did you say “Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together” in response to this?

My last post expresses what I meant to say. I am sorry if I was not clear.

2 Likes

[kumara](#) 376 July 27, 2023, 6:09am

Brahmali:

According to [AN10.72](#), sound is thorn to *jhāna*. This means either that sound can stop you entering *jhāna*, that it can take you out, or both. The moment you hear the sound, however, you are longer in *jhāna*.

The interpretation above does not agree with how *kaṇṭaka* (thorn) is used in that sutta. See [Is Sound Heard When Engaging in the Jhānas? .pdf](#) (70.2 KB)

Brahmali:

kumara:

OK. Then why did you say “Freedom from sensual pleasure means freedom from the five senses. These things are given up together” in response to this?

My last post expresses what I meant to say. I am sorry if I was not clear.

I see that you prefer not to answer. That's ok.

[kumara](#) 377 July 27, 2023, 6:37am

sikkhadhamma:

Brahmali:

there is the separation from the five senses in *jhāna*

Hi, Ajahn! I hope you don't mind, I have two questions as below:

Question #1:

Why is there still a possibility of hearing sounds while being separated from the hearing sense?

You might hear a sound, but it won't distract your concentration. There is the hearing of the sound, but the experience is as if you don't hear anything.

-Ajahn Chah

In case you don't know, Aj Brahm does not follow Aj Chah's meditation teachings.

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 378 July 27, 2023, 7:26am

kumara:

The interpretation above does not agree with how *kaṇṭaka* (thorn) is used on that sutta.

I am sorry, but the context in the *sutta* makes it clear what a thorn means. But this has been discussed here before. There is no point in endlessly rehashing old discussions.

kumara:

I see that you prefer not to answer.

I have no idea what you mean.

kumara:

In case you don't know, Aj Brahm does not follow Aj Chah's meditation teachings.

The right person to talk about this with is Ajahn Brahm. It's easy for you to get access to him whenever he is in Malaysia.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 379 July 27, 2023, 8:25am

Brahmali:

kumara:

In case you don't know, Aj Brahm does not follow Aj Chah's meditation teachings.

The right person to talk about this with is Ajahn Braham. It's easy for you to get access to him whenever he is in Malaysia.

Someone I know personally and trust has already asked him years ago.

[Vaddha](#) 380 July 27, 2023, 2:21pm

[@Sunyo](#)

You may not be interested in returning to the conversation, in which case, all power to you! I just stumbled across something related to MN 128 which I thought was relevant to our discussion on *pre-jhāna* states and nimittas/the divine eye. This is from a book by Ajahn Mahā Boowa, a famous Thai forest meditator who clearly seems to have had much experience with *samādhi*. All bolding is mine for the sake of clarity:

In **Upacāra Samādhi**, when the citta has dropped into a calm state it does not remain in that state, but partially withdraws from it to follow and get to know about various things which have come into contact with the heart. **[The author contrasts this with “appaṇā samādhi” which is stable, firm, and unwavering — equivalent more to the actual jhāna states]**

–

Sometimes something arises concerning oneself and **one sees a vision (nimitta) which is sometimes good and sometimes bad**, but in the first stage the nimitta will generally be something about oneself. **If one is not careful this can lead to trouble**, because nimittas which arise from this kind of samādhi are of innumerable varieties. ... [T]here are a lot of people whose natures are timid and easily frightened, and Upacāra Samādhi may do harm to the citta of a person of this type because this class of samādhi is of **many different kinds and many frightening experiences can occur**. ...

–

As for **external nimittas** which come and go, **one may or may not know whether a nimitta is external or whether it arises from oneself**. But when one has become skilled with internal nimittas which arise from oneself, one will be able to know which are external nimittas. **External nimittas are associated with many different happenings of people, animals, pretas, bhūtas (ghosts of the dead), the son of a deva, a devatā, Indra, or Brahma, any of**

which may at that time be associated with one's samādhi, **even as one talks to a guest who comes on a visit**. When such incidents occur they may last for a long or short time ...

Notice here how, as I pointed to above, the author is saying that the experience of light and forms in meditation may be either internal or external, and that the difference between these two can be difficult to distinguish. Both give rise to the same types of reactions (fear, excitement, etc.) and should be dealt with roughly the same way in terms of one's emotional responses. He also says that the external nimittas (vision of external forms) can be like conversing with a guest, just as the Buddha describes his "light and vision of forms" which he then "conversed with those deities," the same language used in MN 128 for seeing light/forms in meditation.

Note that he describes this as all being a phenomenon in "*upacāra samādhi*" which is a state of concentration **before** attaining *jhāna*. He is describing a series of hurdles and challenges — including wacky experiences of the divine eye — that one must overcome to be able to settle the mind into 'appaṇā samādhi', just as the Buddha describes settling into *jhāna* in MN 128.

Of course, the writings of meditators thousands of years later are not to be taken on the same authority of the suttas. My point in this post is that what this meditator is describing is extremely close to what is described in MN 128, and it matches with my interpretation that that may be referring to the divine eye.

As I said above and before, this experience could be internal or external. The experience and the necessary response really end up being the same for *jhāna*, and it is not so necessary to distinguish the nature of the light/forms unless one is specifically cultivating the psychic powers, divine eye, etc. No matter what it is, MN 128 is describing this experience of transitioning from the desire world of the five senses to the subtle *rūpaloka*, and the wacky things that happen along the way.

It seems that Anuruddha had no problem with seeing these internal or external visions (since he had a propensity for the divine eye), but he did need advice in settling into deep *jhāna* and attaining awakening from it. This is reminiscent of the descriptions of what can happen in "Upacāra Samādhi" from the Thai Forest meditators, in that one is stuck in hindrances or distractions with the divine eye *outside of* and *before* deeper, more stable samādhi.

As a side note, the Chinese parallel to the AN of seeing light/forms and discussing with deities comes right after the Āgama parallel to MN 128 (MA 72). This indicates that both the Pāli commentarial tradition and most likely the Sarvāstivādin traditions interpreted 'light and forms' as related to the divine eye. I think the explanation that these are all of the same nature — visions appear in preliminary samādhi, whether internal or external — is a satisfying middle ground. MN 128 is applicable to our practice whether it is the divine eye or not.

(P.S. I feel your enthusiasm about the practical relevance of this sutta to the experience of the light/forms of pre-*jhānic* states, and I share that! It's amazing the suttas provide these discussions

and descriptions, and I don't want to down play it. Just adding to the understanding of the scope of the text 😊)

Much mettā! 🙏😊

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 382 July 27, 2023, 3:07pm

Brahmali:

It refers to a very subtle remnant of the perceptions of form that is purely mental. *Rūpa* can be entirely mental (such as in dream). This last vestige of form only ceases after the fourth *jhāna*.

Hello Venerable,

I find it very interesting that you think Rupa can be totally mental, because most of the time, the first aggregate is considered to refer exclusively to the physical aspect of our experience linked to the 5 senses. In this [topic](#), Sujato talks a bit about this. Could you please recommend a document (e.g. an article) about what you think Rupa really is?

Also, I've read some of your articles and I find you very interesting, thank you Venerable for your work. Please, do you know if there's a site centralizing all your articles? For example, I found your article Jhana and Lokuttarajjhana on Dhammatalks, but not on [bswa.org](#). I'm afraid I'm missing some of your papers that may be of interest to me.

Thanks in advance, and thanks again Venerable for your work, and I must say that I also really enjoy your Dhamma talks because (among other things) I find that you give off a reassuring aura full of kindness when you speak!

[sikkhadhamma](#) 383 July 27, 2023, 3:15pm

Brahmali:

Rūpa can be entirely mental (such as in dream). This last vestige of form only ceases after the fourth *jhāna*.

Ajahn, do you mean that *rūpa* here is a mental image a.k.a. *nimitta*?

And, is this *rūpa* sensed by *mana* instead of *cakkhu*?

And, is this also the *rūpa* that the Buddha spoke of in SN22.59?

1 Like

[sikkhadhamma](#) 384 July 27, 2023, 3:16pm

kumara:

In case you don't know, Aj Brahm does not follow Aj Chah's meditation teachings.

Oh I see. Thank you, Bhante.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 385 July 27, 2023, 3:55pm

Brahmali:

According to [AN10.72](#), sound is thorn to *jhāna*. This means either that sound can stop you entering *jhāna*, that it can take you out, or both. The moment you hear the sound, however, you are longer in *jhāna*.

Is it sound is a thorn or noise?

sadda

masculine

1. sound; noise; a word

If someone is mediating in a forest they will hear lots of sounds. A loud noise however might pull one from Jhana, and indeed we see the Buddha preferring silence over a racket.

1 Like

[Ceisiwr](#) 386 July 27, 2023, 4:01pm

Brahmali:

There is the freedom from the five senses when you have no attachment to them. And then there is the separation from the five senses in *jhāna*, which is an additional level of freedom.

This then still leaves unexplained how seclusion from sensual pleasures (I take this to mean bodily seclusion) must necessarily mean “without the 5 senses? It doesn’t follow at all so far Bhante.

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 387 July 27, 2023, 4:52pm

Interesting thanks!

By the way, Venerable Sunyo has said that he’s temporarily stopping replying to the topic as he’s currently in retirement (rainy season), but he’ll be back on the topic after retirement to see if there are any interesting replies, so maybe he’ll reply to you later.

Speaking of your topic, do you know if there’s an English translation of [MA 72](#)? It’s the parallel of MN 128. Reading a google translation of the Indonesian translation of the Chinese version, I get the impression that the text is interesting and longer than MN 128, with multiple references to the “internal eye” appearing and disappearing in connection with “forms” and “light”, and with references to jhanas which seem to be presented as a means of stabilizing the internal eye, forms and lights rather than the other way around, and this may give the impression that the Buddha first practised the divine eye without the jhanas, then understood afterwards that concentrating on the jhanas is useful for stabilizing the divine eye. Of course, a google translation of a translation of the Chinese version doesn’t allow me to conclude anything, but just to think that there might be something interesting to study with MA 72. And of course I don’t know anything about Agama, I’m just making unfounded speculations to give ideas.

Here are some extracts from MA 72 from google translation:

Venerable Anuruddha replied:

‘The Blessed One, in this way we are always together in harmony, in comfort and without conflict, in one mind, in one teacher, mixed like water and milk, we reach a state of humanity, a special state, a peaceful abode in tranquility Blessed One, I attained the internal light and then the vision of forms; but the vision of the forms and the internal light immediately disappeared again.’

The Blessed One said:

'Anuruddha, you have not penetrated that sign, that is, the mark of attaining the internal light and the seeing of forms. Then the vision of forms and internal light immediately ceases to exist.

'Earlier, Anuruddha, when I had not attained the realization of the incomparable perfect enlightenment, I also attained internal light and vision of forms; but that vision of forms and internal light soon vanishes again.

'Anuruddha, it occurred to me, "What is the defilement in my mind that has caused my concentration to fall and the internal eye to disappear? With the disappearance of the internal eye, the experience of the brilliant light and the vision of forms which I had previously attained, the vision of forms and the internal light immediately ceased to exist."

'Anuruddha, by practicing diligently, without heedlessness, with a calm and peaceful body, with right mindfulness and right understanding, without confusion, I attained concentration and one-pointedness of mind.

'Anuruddha, it occurred to me, "By practicing diligently, without heedlessness, with a calm and peaceful body, with right mindfulness and right understanding, without confusion, I have attained concentration and one-pointedness of mind."

'I thought thus, "What is not in this world, can I see it and know it?" These doubts, these defilements, arise in my mind. Because of this defilement of doubt, my concentration falls and the internal eye disappears; with the disappearance of the internal eye, the experience of the brilliant light and the vision of forms that I had previously attained, the vision of forms and the internal light disappeared again.

'Anuruddha, right then and there I certainly thought thus, "In my mind the defilements of doubt should not arise!"

(...)

'Anuruddha, right then and there I certainly thought thus, "In my mind the corruptions of doubt should not arise, the corruptions of inattention should not arise, the corruptions of bodily inertia that affect perception should not arise, the corruptions of sloth and torpor should not arise, the corruptions of excessive enthusiasm should not arise, the defilement of lack of enthusiasm should not arise, the defilement of fear should not arise, the defilement of delight should not arise, the defilement of conceit should not arise, the defilement of diversity perception should not arise, and the defilement of not contemplating forms should not arise either!"

'Anuruddha, since I am determined not to give rise to these defilements, I go to live in a remote and secluded place and practice diligently with a mind free from indolence. By practicing diligently with a mind free from indolence while dwelling in a far and secluded place, I attained internal light and vision of forms.

'Anuruddha, if the defilement of doubt arises in my mind, then I purify my mind of it; if the defilements of inattention,...bodily inertia affecting perception,...slowness and torpor,...excessive zeal,...lack of zeal,...fear,...excitement,...conceit,...perception of diversity,...do not contemplate forms arise in my mind, then I purify my mind of it.

'Anuruddha, I further thought thus, "I will cultivate the three stages of concentration: I will cultivate concentration with directed awareness and continuous contemplation ; I will practice concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation ; I will practice concentration without directed awareness and continuous recollection ."

'Again, Anuruddha, I cultivate these three stages of concentration: I cultivate concentration with directed awareness and continuous contemplation ; I practice concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation ; and I practice concentration without directed awareness and continuous recollection .

'If I practice concentration with directed awareness and continuous recollection , then my mind inclines to concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation . In this way I am sure not to lose that knowledge and vision.

'In this way, Anuruddha, knowing it thus, throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the day and night, I practice concentration with directed awareness and continuous contemplation .

'Anuruddha, at that time I was doing the practice of remaining in this stillness. If I practice concentration with directed awareness and continuous recollection , then my mind inclines to concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation . In this way I am sure not to lose that knowledge and vision.

'In this way, Anuruddha, knowing it thus, throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the day and night, I practice concentration with directed awareness and continuous contemplation . Anuruddha, at that time I was doing the practice of remaining in this stillness.

'Anuruddha, if I practice concentration without directed awareness and only continuous recollection , then my mind inclines to concentration with directed awareness and continuous contemplation . In this way I am sure not to lose that knowledge and vision.

'In this way, Anuruddha, knowing it thus, throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the day and night, I practice concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation . Anuruddha, at that time I was doing the practice of remaining in this stillness.

'If I practice concentration without directed awareness and only continuous recollection , then my mind inclines to concentration without directed awareness and continuous recollection . In this way I am sure not to lose that knowledge and vision.

'In this way, Anuruddha, knowing it thus, throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the day and night, I practice concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation . Anuruddha, at that time I was doing the practice of remaining in this stillness.

'If I practice concentration without directed awareness and continuous recollection , then my mind inclines to concentration with directed awareness and continuous recollection . In this way I am sure not to lose that knowledge and vision.

'In this way, Anuruddha, knowing it thus, throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the day and night, I cultivate concentration without directed awareness and continuous contemplation . Anuruddha, at that time I was doing the practice of remaining in this stillness.

'If I practice concentration without directed awareness and continuous recollection , then my mind inclines to concentration without directed awareness and only continuous contemplation . In this way I am sure not to lose that knowledge and vision.

(...)

'Anuruddha, sometimes I gain knowledge of the infinite internal light and the infinite vision of forms. Anuruddha, I thought thus, "For what reason, for what cause, have I acquired the infinite knowledge of internal light and the infinite vision of forms?"

'Anuruddha, I further thought thus, "If I enter into immeasurable concentration, then because of gaining immeasurable concentration the internal eye is endowed with immeasurable purity. Because the internal eye is imbued with immeasurable purity, I gain knowledge of immeasurable internal light and immeasurable vision of forms."

'In this way, Anuruddha, knowing it thus, throughout the day, throughout the night, throughout the day and night, I acquired the infinite knowledge of the internal light and the

infinite vision of forms. Anuruddha, at that time I was doing the practice of remaining in this stillness.

[DeadBuddha](#) 388 July 27, 2023, 7:39pm

Ceisiwr:

I think a natural reading of the Indriya section of SN is that sukha in Jhāna is physical, not mental.

I don't know what you think, but personally, it doesn't seem aberrant to me to say that during jhana, sukha is purely mental and is purely produced by the mind, but that this sukha is nevertheless felt at the level of our body. It's a bit as if sukha were a kind of hallucination which we would feel existed at the level of our entire physical body (including the tips of our toes), when in truth it's just a mental production.

I don't know if this interpretation is true, but it seems to me that saying sukha is purely mental doesn't go against "bodily jhanas" (= jhanas where we still feel the physical body).

[cant](#) 389 July 27, 2023, 8:32pm

DeadBuddha:

Speaking of your topic, do you know if there's an English translation of [MA 72](#)?

Bhikkhu Analayo and Roderick Bucknell have translated the MA and DA for BDK America and their translations are available for free in PDF form. You can find MA 72 in Volume II: [The Madhyama Āgama \(Middle-Length Discourses\), Vol. II - BDK America](#)

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 390 July 27, 2023, 10:20pm

Extremely interesting, thank you!

On page 736 (on a note), [this book](#) (written by Venerable Analayo) comparing Pali suttas and Agamas gives an argument against the idea that MN 128 speaks of the divine eye:

This is not the way the commentary understands this passage, however, as Ps IV 207,11 takes the expression “vision of forms” to stand for seeing forms with the divine eye, *dassanañ ca rūpānañ ti dibbacakkhunā rūpadassanañ ca sañjānāma*. The commentarial explanation could be inspired by AN 8:64 at

AN IV 302,14, where to see forms and perceive lights leads to being able to converse with devas.

In the

present context, however, the commentarial explanation does not seem to fit the context, pace Schlingloff 1985: 330, since the exercise of the divine eye requires the concentrative stability of the fourth jhāna, whereas in MN 128 and MĀ 72 the level of concentration achieved through stabilizing the vision of

lights and forms is evidently lower, leading at MN 128 at MN III 162,14 and MĀ 72 at T I 538c3 to concentration with initial and sustained mental application, *savitakka savicāra samādhi*/有覺有觀定,

which corresponds to the first jhāna only.

I think it's a good argument. This book also gives other arguments. It starts talking about MA 72 (parallel to MN 128) on page 731.

Incidentally, this passage is an argument in favor of visuddhimagga jhanas, page 736 :

This list of mental obstructions does not mention the first two of the five hindrances, sensual desire and aversion. Their absence indicates that the meditative development described in the present discourse sets in at a more advanced stage, when these two comparatively gross mental defilements have been subdued and a minimum degree of mental tranquillity has already been established. It is precisely at this point, when the gross hindrances of sensual desire and aversion have been overcome and the mind becomes increasingly concentrated, that according to the Visuddhimagga's account the mental sign, the nimitta, will manifest to the meditator.²⁵⁰ Thus it seems that the present passage covers the same phenomena described in the Visuddhimagga in terms of a nimitta that needs to be stabilized and mastered in order to be able to attain jhāna.

Thank you again !!!

DeadBuddha:

Could you please recommend a document (e.g. an article) about what you think Rupa really is?

Sorry I can't. But it is fairly obvious that we can imagine or dream about sights, and even touches. This is mental *rūpa*.

DeadBuddha:

I'm afraid I'm missing some of your papers that may be of interest to me.

Most of them should be on the BSWA website. The one *jhāna* and *lokuttarajjhāna* is missing because it is copyrighted. The only other copyright article I have written is on the nature of Nibbāna, which you can find [here](#).

DeadBuddha:

I find that you give off a reassuring aura full of kindness when you speak!

Thanks for the kind feedback!

sikkhadhamma:

Ajahn, do you mean that *rūpa* here is a mental image a.k.a. *nimitta*?

No, the mental image is gone at this stage. It's an even more subtle aspect of perception.

sikkhadhamma:

And, is this *rūpa* sensed by *mana* instead of *cakkhu*?

Yes.

sikkhadhamma:

And, is this also the *rūpa* that the Buddha spoke of in [SN22.59](#)?

It is *included* in the *rūpa* described at SN22.59.

Ceisiwr:

Is it sound is a thorn or noise?

All sound in principle, but noise is obviously more problematic.

Ceisiwr:

This then still leaves unexplained how seclusion from sensual pleasures (I take this to mean bodily seclusion) must necessarily mean “without the 5 senses? It doesn’t follow at all so far Bhante.

There is the freedom that comes from eliminating *kāmacchanda*, “sense desire”. This happens before *jhāna* and is a requirement for entering *jhāna*. Then there is the freedom of seclusion, *vivicceva*, which is the freedom from the five senses within a *jhāna*.

3 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 392 July 27, 2023, 10:44pm

Brahmali:

Sorry I can’t. But it is fairly obvious that we can imagine or dream about sights, and even touches. This is mental *rūpa*.

Yes, I see what you mean, but it’s true that I used to think that for *rupa* what really counted was the link with actual physical “sense organs”, so I thought that the “sensory perceptions” of dreams didn’t count as *rupa* because they aren’t linked to physical “sense organs”

Brahmali:

Most of them should be on the BSWA website. The one *jhāna* and *lokuttarajjhāna* is missing because it is copyrighted. The only other copyright article I have written is on the nature of Nibbāna, which you can find [here](#).

Thank you very much! We are very lucky here to be able to discuss with scholars like you, thank you again. I find that the arguments of Venerable Sujato, Venerable Sunyo, your arguments, etc., are really often very very strong and powerful.

2 Likes

[Ceisiwr](#) 393 July 28, 2023, 6:25am

Brahmali:

Then there is the freedom of seclusion, *vivicceva*, which is the freedom from the five senses within a *jhāna*.

It's secluded from sensual pleasures though Bhante, not the 5 senses. Nothing in that suggests one isn't aware on some level of the other senses at all. So far the only reason for it meaning that is in already thinking it means that, it seems to me.

2 Likes

[Pondera](#) 394 July 28, 2023, 6:46am

If I can weigh in.

We have examples in the suttas of meditators "one upping" each other during absorption.

For example we have one (I can't recall, but it may have been Alara Kalama) being said to have meditated (not sure in which jhana) amongst a royal entourage of elephants, carts, etcetera. passing by - and he did not hear it or see it.

So, the other meditator (could have been the Buddha himself) is said to have meditated during a lightening storm which killed three people - and he did not notice.

I'm not always one to assume, but I don't think total non perception of sound is the meaning of thorn. As I write this post I'm surrounded by various sounds which I'm sure I'm taking little note of.

Like you say, in the forest there are many sounds. I'd go out on a limb and say one can reach very minimal stages of absorption without paying much mind to surrounding sounds (especially in a forest environment).

It's when a person comes by and addresses you (or something like that) where the absorption is broken or stifled.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 395 July 28, 2023, 8:40am

Sunyo:

Then still I'd say that if pleasant sights, sounds, etc. are abandoned, it is only natural that unpleasant sights, sounds, etc. are *also* abandoned. This is also what [AN5.176](#) says: that in the first jhāna there are no pleasure *and* pain connected with the sense objects (*kāmas*). So, to come back to the original question of this topic, this also indicates that the first jhāna is already beyond physical pleasure and pain, that physical pain doesn't end only at the fourth jhāna. The sutta also clearly separates this type of pleasure and pain from the pleasure and pain that come from the unskillful (i.e. the hindrances), showing that *kāmas* in context of the jhānas is not sensual desire (or "sensuality"), which is already included in the hindrances—as you agree (but others don't).

The sutta says that three types of pain are not present during jhana:

- The pain and sadness connected with sensual pleasures.
- The pain and sadness connected with the unskillful.
- The pain and sadness connected with the skillful.

But for the moment I don't see how this sutta explicitly talks about physical pain.

I'm having a bit of trouble understanding your post: is your reason your interpretation of Pali?

Would you have translated it differently, with "objects of the senses" rather than "sensual pleasure"?

[DeadBuddha](#) 396 July 28, 2023, 2:58pm

In this [book](#), Venerable Analayo writes the following about Upakkilesa Sutta:

In the Upakkilesa-sutta the experience of inner light (and forms) only serves to reflect whether the mind is becoming more concentrated or else has succumbed to some minor defilement that obstructs entry into absorption. The discourse does not give the impression that the light itself should become the object of meditation, in fact no object of meditation is described at all. This holds similarly for the standard account of absorption attainment in the discourses, which describes the condition of the mind by listing the mental factors characteristic of a particular

level of absorption but without any additional reference to an object employed for entering absorption
(...)

By pointing out that the description in the Upakkilesa-sutta does not present the experience of light as the object of the practice, I do not intend to imply that there is anything wrong in focusing on the light, once it has become naturally bright and stable. My point is only that this mode of practice is not evident in the Upakkilesa-sutta and, although for many meditators it can be a very powerful approach, it need not be considered the only possible route into absorption

In this book, Venerable Analaya seems to put the importance of MN 128 in achieving absorption into perspective.

Incidentally, I noticed that in this [book](#) and this [article](#), he conceives of Anapanasati not as a simple focusing of attention on one point of the breath, but as a more open and flexible experience of our experience.

Incidentally, a little anecdote, here Venerable Analayo explains in this [video](#) that a few years ago he had a tendency to get angry quickly, and he practiced focused concentration at a point on the breath: he says that this focused concentration increased his tendency to anger.

Also, he says something very similar to Venerable [@kumara](#) 's idea that samadhi is “composure” rather than concentration, [here](#).

[DeadBuddha](#) 397 July 28, 2023, 3:48pm

[@Ceisiwr](#) You seem to think that during jhana, the meditator has a subtle body. But DN 2 (and other suttas) speak, only after the fourth jhana, of a “mind-made body” which is physical despite the fact that it is a creation of the mind. Don’t you think it’s rather at this point that there’s a subtle deva body? If so, this seems to imply that during the jhanas, there is no such subtle physical body.

[kumara](#) 398 July 29, 2023, 12:54am

DeadBuddha:

he says something very similar to Venerable [@kumara](#) 's idea that samadhi is “composure” rather than concentration, [here](#).

Since all these appear only in recent years, it’s hard for me not to think that he was influenced by my book. I did show him my draft many years ago.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 399 July 29, 2023, 1:06am

sikkhadhamma:

kumara:

In case you don’t know, Aj Brahm does not follow Aj Chah’s meditation teachings.

Oh I see. Thank you, Bhante.

In fact, Aj Chah says

That which can be most harmful to the meditator is absorption samādhi (jhāna), the samādhi with deep, sustained calm. This samādhi brings great peace. Where there is peace, there is happiness. When there is happiness, attachment and clinging to that happiness arise. The meditator doesn’t want to contemplate anything else, he just wants to indulge in that pleasant feeling. When we have been practising for a long time we may become adept at entering this samādhi very quickly. As soon as we start to note our meditation object, the mind enters calm, and we don’t want to come out to investigate anything. We just get stuck on that happiness. This is a danger to one who is practising meditation. (from *A Taste of Freedom*)

Bear in mind the above is using orthodox Theravadin terminology.

2 Likes

[Pondera](#) 400 July 29, 2023, 4:25am

I think deva realm and mind made realm are different, with deva lower and mind made higher. I could be wrong 🙄

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 401 July 29, 2023, 4:26am

Ceisiwr:

It's secluded from sensual pleasures though Bhante, not the 5 senses.

This too has been discussed at length before with many good reasons given why this refers to the five senses. I doubt it will be productive to engage in this once more.

1 Like

[kumara](#) 402 July 29, 2023, 6:26am

Brahmali:

This too has been discussed at length before with many good reasons given why this refers to the five senses. I doubt it will be productive to engage in this once more.

Bhante, this is another way of saying, "We've discussed among ourselves before and have arrived at the right understanding, and so I don't see how any further discussion would be useful. Case closed."

1 Like

[Preston](#) 403 July 29, 2023, 1:59pm

Bhante,

As an interesting fact for you, Geoff Shatz (nyana) used the composure translation prior to your book.

For example from his old website measureless mind:

Integral Meditative Composure (Sammāsamādhi)

The Pali noun samādhi is related to the verb samādhāti, which means “to put together,” “to join,” “to combine,” “to collect,” and the past participle of the same verb, samāhita, meaning “collected,” “composed.” Thus, samādhi indicates “collecting” one’s mind, and specifically in the context of sammāsamādhi, the mind composed in meditation. It is this composed mental unification which is termed singleness of mind (cittakaggata). It is also called jhana.

4 Likes

[Vaddha](#) 404 July 29, 2023, 5:04pm

Brahmali:

Rūpa can be entirely mental (such as in dream). This last vestige of form only ceases after the fourth *jhāna*.

Hello, Ajahn 🙏

I’m curious if you could go into more detail about your understanding of *rūpasāññā* in *jhāna*. Bhante [@sujaṭo](#) in his writings and notes talks of the *rūpa* experienced in *jhāna* as being the *nimitta* or remnants of the *nimitta*, such as light. But you and Ajahn Brahm, etc. seem to have a different interpretation — I’m wondering if this is just a difference in phrasing but not meaning, or if there is a difference in meaning/understanding of perception within *jhāna*.

In the workshop on *sammā samādhi*, I think there was some brief mention of this with very little detail. It was essentially said that it’s hard to describe how *rūpa* is part of the *jhāna* without comparison to the *arūpa* states. I understand the subtlety in terms of the mind mostly experiencing *rūpa* as more of the echoes/memory of refined proprioception without the five senses, a kind of extrapolated space derived from the previous knowledge of the body filled with bliss and awareness. But this seems to be a point with various interpretations from various practitioners and sects.

This is one of the things I’ve seen discussed in much less detail. Five senses in relation to *jhāna*, lots of talk. But as for the details of the mental experience, there seems to be some difference that is set aside and dominated by the discussion of the senses. As [@Ceisiwr](#) mentioned, other early schools of Buddhism interpreted the *jhānas* as including perceptions of a subtle, radiant body or various *nimittas*, but others interpret the *nimittas* as only being present pre-*jhāna*. This also relates to the

‘debates’ about experiencing *nimittas* vs. ‘absorbing’ into *nimittas*, and the relation of this to *jhāna*, the eight liberations (*vimokkhā*), etc.

Any thoughts (from either of the venerables or others)?

Mettā 😊

1 Like

[kumara](#) 405 July 30, 2023, 12:16am

Oh, that’s very interesting. I’ve not read this before. Thanks for sharing.

1 Like

[Brahmali](#) 406 July 30, 2023, 1:12am

Hi Venerable,

It’s tricky because it’s so refined. It’s a bit like asking what *vitakka-vicāra* is in first *jhāna*, except it’s even more profound. It’s hard to grasp this until you’ve had a proper first *jhāna* experience. In the same way, understanding the remaining *rūpasaññā* is only really possible when you go beyond it, that is, reach the first immaterial attainment.

What we can say is that it is not like the *nimitta* before *jhāna*. Entering a *jhāna* is commonly experienced as falling into or being engulfed by the *nimitta*. From this it might be that the remaining “brightness” of the mind is somehow tied to *rūpa*. I have to admit that this is somewhat speculative. Have you looked at the discussion in the Visuddhimagga?

2 Likes

[DeadBuddha](#) 407 July 31, 2023, 3:41pm

With the translations of Ven. Sujato and Ven. Ṭhānissaro, it seems to me that MN 64 proves that there can be no physical pain during the first jhana :

Idhānanda, bhikkhu upadhivivekā akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānā sabbaso kāyaduṭṭhullānaṃ paṭippassaddhiyā vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamāṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.

It's when a mendicant—due to the seclusion from attachments, the giving up of unskillful qualities, and **the complete settling of physical discomfort**—quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. (Ven. Sujato)

There is the case where a monk—from being secluded from acquisitions, from the abandoning of unskillful qualities, **from the entire calming of bodily discomfort**, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. (Ven. Ṭhānissaro)

But with Ven. Bodhi, it does not seem that the sutta speaks of physical pain:

Here, with seclusion from the acquisitions, with the abandoning of unwholesome states, **with the complete tranquillization of bodily inertia**, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. (Ven. Bodhi)

What do you think? Can MN 64 be used as evidence to show that there can be no physical pain during the first jhana?

Thanks in advance

[Preston](#) 408 July 31, 2023, 5:31pm

DeadBuddha:

Can [MN 64](#) be used as evidence to show that there can be no physical pain during the first jhana?

If we do take it this way, and it seems like we should then both SN 48.40 (contradicted by other suttas, some cited in this long thread) and it's agama parallel (contradicted by MN 64 quote you share) are contradicted by different parts of the canon. It makes me want to throw away both of them as being later works instead of trying to find the 'correct' one.

1 Like

[DeadBuddha](#) 409 July 31, 2023, 5:57pm

Interesting, thank you. This brings us back to the original question of the topic.

As a reminder, SN 48.40 says that physical pain disappears in the first jhana, and its parallel (found in several Buddhist schools) says that physical pain disappears in the second jhana. Taking the translation of Ven. Sujato and Ven. Thanissaro's translation, we get the impression that MN 64 says that physical pain disappears at the first jhana, whereas with Ven. Bodhi's translation, we get the impression that MN 64 is simply saying that bodily inertia (I understand "bodily heaviness") disappears with the first jhana.

The pali of MN 64's passage is :

Idhānanda, bhikkhu upadhivivekā akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ **pahānā sabbaso kāyaduṭṭhullānaṃ paṭippassaddhiyā** vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajāṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamāṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.

Looking in the DPD dictionary, it says that the word that Ven. Sujato and Ven. Thanissaro translate as "physical/bodily discomfort" is "kāyaduṭṭhullānaṃ" and this word means "sluggishness; physical inertia; bodily heaviness", and "duṭṭhulla" means "heaviness; discomfort; inertia;".

Taking into account what the dictionary says, I have the impression that the term "physical/bodily incomfort" is too broad, and that the word actually means a kind of "bodily heaviness/apathy".

But I must point out that I know nothing at all about Pali. Perhaps someone here can explain the meaning of this passage from the sutta!?

[DeadBuddha](#) 410 August 1, 2023, 11:59am

[Here](#), Ven. Bodhi explains that he understands the passage to mean the tranquilization of bodily disturbances (such as agitation). So in the end, his interpretation seems similar to that of Ven.

Sujato and Ven. Thanissaro. But I wonder if in their minds, this passage includes physical pain. It seems to me that yes.